

*Blackwell  
Companions to  
Philosophy*

A COMPANION TO  
PHILOSOPHY OF  
RELIGION  
*Second Edition*



*Edited by*  
CHARLES TALIAFERRO,  
PAUL DRAPER,  
AND PHILIP L. QUINN

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# A Companion to Philosophy of Religion

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# A Companion to Philosophy of Religion

Second Edition

*Edited by*

Charles Taliaferro, Paul Draper,  
and Philip L. Quinn



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## **Philip L. Quinn (1940–2004)**

The second edition of *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* is dedicated with great affection and appreciation to the senior editor of the first edition: Philip L. Quinn. Quinn's approach and commitment to philosophy of religion was capacious and exciting. While he was open to alternative, experimental methods and conclusions in the philosophy of religion, he was exacting in seeking clarity and rigor. Trained in physics as well as philosophy, Quinn also made vital contributions to philosophy of science. In the philosophy of religion, his essays, lectures, and reviews were deeply and widely influential. A good introduction to this work is the collection of many of his papers in *Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Christian B. Miller. He also authored a book, *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements*, now a classic contribution to debate about religion and ethics. More than a great scholar, Quinn's service to the profession was extensive. He generously contributed his time and energy to the American Philosophical Association; he was editor of the journal *Faith and Philosophy* from 1990 to 1995; and he served as a reviewer for 20 other journals in philosophy and for 27 presses, including Wiley-Blackwell. Each year, when the APA recognizes someone's service to philosophy and philosophers, they do so by awarding the "Quinn Prize" in honor of Philip L. Quinn.

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## Introduction to the Second Edition

This *Companion*, like the first edition, is a guide to philosophy of religion for non-specialists, but it will also engage specialists. When the first edition was published in 1997, there was nothing else like it in print. It is a testament to the success of that edition that this second edition emerges in a crowded field. Such crowding is not necessarily bad. There is strength in numbers because no single collection can hope to cover all there is to cover in a field as rich and diverse as philosophy of religion. Our challenge as editors of a second edition was both to retain and build on the strengths of the first edition and to add brand-new material that separates the new edition from its ancestor and from the rest of the field. To that end, we not only updated and reorganized the chapters in the first edition, but also added more than 20 new chapters.

One of the unique parts of this edition is the last one, which is called “Current Trends and New Directions.” It contains new essays on Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion (by John Whittaker), continental philosophy of religion (by John Caputo), evidentialism (by Richard Swinburne), and philosophical reflection on mysticism (by Anthony Perovich). These are combined with updated chapters on theological realism and anti-realism, reformed epistemology, feminism, philosophical reflection on scripture and revelation, religious pluralism, and comparative philosophy of religion.

One of our main goals for this new edition was to include more atheistic and other non-theistic perspectives. Coverage of non-theistic *religious* perspectives was enhanced by adding new chapters on Hinduism (by Jonardon Ganeri), on pantheism (by Michael Levine), and on reincarnation and karma (by Paul Reasoner). More ambitiously, five new chapters discuss challenges to the truth of theism: Michael Martin on theism and incoherence, Klaas Kraay on the problem of no best world, Michael Peterson on the logical argument from evil, Graham Oppy on the evidential argument from evil, and John Schellenberg on divine hiddenness. In an act of contrition, three new chapters on the justification of theistic belief were also added: one by Peter van Inwagen on ontological arguments, one by Stewart Goetz on arguments from consciousness and free will, and one by one of us (Draper) on cumulative cases for theism. A chapter by Samantha Corte on the ethics of *agnostic* religious commitment is also new.

We also added chapters at the beginning of certain parts of the book when they were needed to introduce that part. For example, in the first edition, the part on the concept of God included chapters on a variety of specific “divine attributes,” but provided no

discussion of why those attributes are thought to be a part of the concept of God. In the second edition, this part now begins with a new chapter by Mark Webb on perfect being theology. Perfect being theology attempts to infer God's specific attributes from the (controversial) claim that the concept of God just is the concept of a being that possesses all (absolute) perfections. Another example concerns the part of the book on religion and science. A new chapter by John Hedley Brooke called "Historical Perspectives on Religion and Science" now introduces that part.

Brooke's chapter also exemplifies a conscious effort to reinforce the emphasis of the first edition on the history of philosophy of religion. Four other new chapters also exemplify that effort. Two of these examine early modern philosophical theology. One covers thinkers from the Continent and is authored by Derk Pereboom, while the other covers Great Britain and is penned by Geoffrey Gorham. Another two chapters focus on the twentieth century. One of these, by Brian Hebblethwaite, surveys twentieth-century natural theology from some of the early Gifford lecturers to Richard Swinburne; the other, by Jacqueline Mariña, explores the depths of Rudolf Otto's brilliant work on the idea of the holy.

New chapters, however, are not all that is new in the second edition. Most of the old chapters have been revised to take into account recent literature, and a list of recommended readings has been appended to all 85 of the chapters in the book. Also, cross-referencing has been expanded (extending even to this introduction), and the cover of the second edition is graced with highly numinous artwork by Jil Evans (for a detailed discussion of the numinous, see Chapter 26, Holiness.)

We dedicate this edition of the *Companion* to Philip L. Quinn with gratitude and deep respect, not just for his pioneering work as the senior editor of the first edition, but also for his lifetime of contributions to philosophy of religion and to the field of philosophy in general.

Paul Draper  
Charles Taliaferro  
December 2009

## Part I

# Philosophical Issues in the Religions of the World

# 1

## Hinduism

JONARDON GANERI

It is by now commonplace to observe that “Hinduism” is a term of comparatively recent provenance, an outsider’s designation of forms of religiosity happening to belong to a particular geographical region. It has rightly been said that it serves at best as “an acceptable abbreviation for a family of culturally similar traditions” (Lipner 1994, p. 6), that it is a sort of catchall for what is “in truth a group of religions which have much in common between them, but in which there are also many differences and contrasts” (Hacker 2006, p. 479). Minimally, the term has been used to designate those non-Buddhist, non-Jaina, non-Muslim, and non-Sikh forms of religious life in the Indian sub-continent which have in some (often rather loose) sense drawn inspiration from these groups of texts: the Vedas (prescriptions of a variety of types of ritual practice) and associated work on ritual theory; the books about social duty and political obligation of Manu and other works that pertain to the concept of dharma “duty”; the two epic stories, the Mahābhārata, of which the Bhagavadgītā – Karna’s advice to Arjuna on the eve of battle – is a part, and the Rāmāyana, the story of Rāma; and the Upanisads (“hidden teachings” about the self) and the commentaries on them. Many other texts are of equal centrality for one or another group. Attempts to provide a more substantive characterization of Hinduism have always been associated with attempts to impose one or another political conception of India, or to superimpose on it a philosophical ideology, and for that reason I think that the only wise course is to retain maximal flexibility and caution. My aim in this chapter is to examine key issues philosophers within one or another Hindu tradition have taken to be the central problems in the philosophy of religion. I will also try to use this approach to show that the discipline of “philosophy of religion” must work toward a self-understanding that does not impose European paradigms on non-European approaches to religion or philosophy. The fact that almost no “Hindu” doctrine goes unquestioned or unchallenged by another “Hindu” shows that the emphasis must be on the dynamics of philosophical dialogue with the tradition, rather than the defense of certain propositions. There are Hindus who deny the existence of God, and there are Hindus who deny that there is life after death; the real focus of interest therefore is on the nature of internal ways of challenging, affirming, re-evaluating, and redescribing what are taken to be the fundamental philosophical issues.

The Vedas are taken by the philosophers of classical India to consist essentially in an eternal, authorless body of ritual imperatives of the general schematic form “One who desires heaven ought to perform the agnihotra sacrifice.” Of course, the prescription of ritual performance is but one part of this complex corpus of texts, the earliest of which, the RgVeda, dates back to many centuries BCE (dating the texts with any degree of accuracy is, unfortunately, extremely problematic). A school studying the philosophical basis of Vedic ritual theory came into being; its foundational text is the Mīmāṃsā-sūtra, the term “mīmāṃsā” implying “examination with reasons.” The best-known of the Mīmāṃsā intellectuals are Śābara (c. 400 CE) and Kumārila (c. 650 CE). Mīmāṃsā represents, we might note, a strand of atheism within Hinduism; other Hindus believe there is a single cosmic principle, called *brahman*. And in popular expressions of religion there are, of course, many gods that provide the immediate objects of devotion. The fact that there are atheist as well as monotheist and polytheist Hindus ought to be enough of a warning about selecting some one strand of thought within Hinduism and claiming that it is “central.”

There are, indeed, as many concepts of reason in India as there are calendars. An important contrast within orthodox Hinduism is reflected in the use of the terms *hetu*, “evidence-based rationality,” and *tarka*, “hypothesis-based rationality.” Part of the Hindu canon is made up of a variety of “lawbooks” about *dharma* – moral, social, and religious duty, including duties specific to the “stations” of life. These lawbooks are collectively known as the *dharmaśāstra*, and they are also said to be *smṛti*, “what is remembered,” in contrast with the Veda, which is called *śruti*, “what is heard.” The *Manu-smṛti* – the lawbook of Manu – is the most important and popular of such texts. It was composed in the second to third century CE (see Olivelle 2005, p. 25). Manu is disappointingly unequivocal in his criticism of the unconstrained use of evidence-based reason (Manu 2.10–11), but he is considerably more willing to allow the use of hypothesis-based rationality (Manu 12.106). A careful examination of the resources of such embedded rationality reveals that there is an underlying model of considerable flexibility and power. This model of rationality is based on two sorts of principles: (1) principles for the selection of paradigmatic cases or exemplars, and (2) principles for the mapping of truths about the paradigms onto truths about other cases, based on rules of adaptation and substitution. One might imagine the way one reasons when trying to change the battery of a new car, a process that involves remembering the procedure that worked on the old car and adapting it to fit the layout and design of the new one. Clearly this “blueprint + adaptation” model is situational and particularist. I believe that it came to serve as the basis of a general theory of moral reasoning, leaving behind its origins in the hermeneutics of ritual (see Ganeri 2004).

If we do use the term “Hinduism,” we must, as I have said, surrender the expectation of being able to describe anything as the “essence” of the contribution of Hinduism to the philosophy of religion, or the belief that it is likely that we shall be able to uncover substantive generalizations that are both true and interesting. Wittgenstein (to whom the idea of such family-resemblance designation is due), in lecture notes from 1930–33, gave voice to a more fundamental difficulty that needs to be addressed in the comparative philosophical study of religions: that although each of the members of the family may use a common vocabulary of religious terms, their usages might be, in his phrase, “grammatically incomparable.” Thus,

About “God” his [Wittgenstein’s] main point seemed to be that this word is used in many grammatically different senses. He said, for instance, that many controversies about God could be settled by saying “I’m not using the word in such a sense that you can say ...,” and that different religions “treat things as making sense which others treat as nonsense, and don’t merely deny some proposition which another religion affirms”; and he illustrated this by saying that if people use “God” to mean something like a human being, then “God has four arms” and “God has two arms” will both have sense, but that others so use “God” that “God has arms” is nonsense – would say “God can’t have arms.” ... To explain what he meant by “grammatically” different senses, he said we wanted terms which are not “comparable” ... but which differ as, e.g., “chair” differs from “permission to sit on a chair,” or “railway” from “railway accident.” (Moore 1955, pp. 16–17)

It makes little sense to ask when the railway occurred, although it does make sense to ask when the railway accident took place, because these two terms have, in Wittgenstein’s special sense of the expression, different “grammars,” delimitations of what is properly sayable. It is perhaps the case that the controversies between Buddhism and Hinduism over *karman*, moral “action,” and *ātman*, “self,” are incomparable in just this manner, the apparently metaphysical claim that *ātman* can’t be a substance being translatable, following Wittgenstein’s proposal, into the higher-order claim that “*ātman* is a substance” does not say anything, given the Buddhist use of the term. The lesson I shall draw for the purposes of this chapter, however, is that we should not take the conceptual apparatus and vocabulary of the discipline of philosophy of religion as somehow antecedently given, and so already available to shape our discussion of Hinduism’s contribution. Rather, we should ask, of some given Hindu thinker or group of thinkers, how we are to understand the philosophical questions made salient to them by their religious dispositions and outlooks. The familiar, given categories in the philosophy of religion can seem to provide a Procrustean bed for discussion, but in fact need to adapt themselves to the particular, so that a theoretical framework emerges in response to the specificities of the case in hand.

It is important to understand how embedded resources of reason can make internal dissent possible. This is especially the case with respect to the broad family of culturally similar traditions that is Hinduism, for Hinduism has often been regarded by its opponents as intolerant of dissent and by its proponents as speaking with a single voice. As the Mīmāṃsā philosophers I referred to above make clear, the models of reason that are embedded within Hinduism make possible the existence of dissent and disagreement, for different decisions about what counts as an appropriate adaptation, and also what counts as a relevant paradigm, can always be advanced and defended (cf. the dialecticians’ concept of *jāti*, reasoning about appropriate and inappropriate resemblance). As a resource to be drawn upon in reasoning about one’s choices, the model is a highly versatile one. In this chapter I concentrate on one of the many skeptical voices *within* Hinduism, one that challenges the moral authority of the Vedas on rational grounds. The argument appeals to broad principles of rational interpretation: the Vedas, it is said, are verifiably mistaken, internally inconsistent, and pointlessly repetitious. As speech-acts, the argument continues, they resemble the delusional ramblings of a drunkard; they carry no epistemological authority. An uncharitable view of religious tolerance might lead one to expect this skepticism to be met with censure and condemnation, but in fact it is joined in argument and used to press for a



deeper understanding of the philosophical foundations. Other principles of rational interpretation that resolve the inconsistencies and explain the repetitions are advanced, and a justification of the assent-worthiness of the Vedic pronouncements is sought in a general epistemology of testimony. Such examination might also shed light on the relationship between the *smṛti* and the *śruti*, which is fundamental to Hinduism's conception of itself as a religion in some way *based on* the Vedas. For it is in the *smṛti*, the codified tradition of religious instruction, rather than the *śruti*, the "revealed" word describing by-and-large arcane ritual practices, that the actual duties of Hindus are described.

For at least one such group, the fundamental philosophical question about religion is the following: given that the statements of the Vedic corpus – whether they be heard or read – deserve credence, what is the rational foundation of that assent-worthiness? In virtue of what does the Veda belong within the space of reason? This is the problem examined in the discussion under Nyāya-sūtra 2.1.57–68. A skeptical opponent is made to voice the problem: "They [the Vedas] cannot command assent, because they suffer from the following epistemological defects: falsity, inconsistency, and repetition" (NS 2.1.57: *tad-aprāmānyam anṛta-vyāghāta-punarukta-dosebhaḥ*).

It is, one should note, far from atypical of a Hindu text for dialectical space to be given for skeptical, dissenting voices, for the critical stance to be taken seriously, and for detailed argument and counter-argument to ensue. The most famous, though by no means most philosophical, example is Rgveda 10.129: "Whence this creation has arisen – perhaps it formed itself, or perhaps it did not – the One who looks down on it, in the highest heaven, only He knows – or perhaps He does not know." Nyāyasūtra 2.1.57 articulates a fundamental skeptical worry about the entire legitimacy and epistemic value of the Vedas themselves, perhaps the voice of some actual doubter, perhaps only a hypothetical one (that is to say, a *pūrvapakṣa*). It is, as we will see, through reason alone that such voices are sought to be answered.

What, first of all, does the term "falsity" signify in the skeptical challenge? Remembering that the canonical form of a Vedic statement is the hypothetical imperative – "One who desires result X should perform action Y" – "falsity" here consists in the observed performance of the prescribed action Y with the observed non-occurrence of the declared result X. The Vedas lend themselves to empirical disconfirmation because they frequently make claims about the observable results of ordinary actions, for example, prescribing a certain rite for someone who wants a child. Might one attempt to avoid the risk of empirical disconfirmation by restricting Vedic assent-worthiness to those hypotheticals that prescribe trans-empirical results? Vātsyāyana, one of the commentators on the Nyāya-sūtra, foresees this move, and answers on behalf of the skeptic that the observable "falsity" of the Vedas in some cases discredits them in all (NBh 90, 13–16). Trust is undermined by infectious evidence of unreliability. For that reason, the claim of the Maitrāyana Upanisad, "One who desires heaven should perform the agnihotra" (Mai Up. 6.36), is also, in an extended sense of the term, false, not because the alleged result observably fails to occur, but because the claim belongs within a class upon all of whose members suspicion has fallen.

The defect named "inconsistency" covers a pair of cases. First, there is the case where one text seems to command a certain act, but another text seems to condemn the performance of that same act. Thus, "After sunrise, perform the sacrifice," but also "The

sacrifice performed after sunrise goes to the dogs.” Second, there are cases where a single act is commanded in both texts, but the attendant specifications of circumstances are incompatible. Thus, “After sunrise, perform the sacrifice” and “Before sunrise, perform the sacrifice.” Uddyotakara, another commentator, points out that the mutual incompatibility might be thought in terms of the injunctions conjunctively implying that there is no time at which the sacrifice is enjoined to be performed (NV 251, 16–19). Finally, the defect of repetition is exemplified by cases in which the same thing is said over and over again, redundantly, which Vātsyāyana (on behalf of the skeptic) likens to the speech of a drunkard (*pramatta-vākya*; NBh 91, 8)!

These three defects are really three different ways in which the religious canon fails to be compatible with reason: by being empirically falsified, and so incompatible with observable fact; by being internally inconsistent, and so incompatible with logic; and by being rambling and repetitious, incompatible with pragmatic constraints on coherence. Turning the argument around, we can say that those defects constitute at least a necessary condition for assent-worthiness in discourse: a body of discourse commands our assent only if the discourse is consistent with the known facts, internally coherent, and subject to pragmatic constraints on intelligibility. Any discourse should “make sense” along these three dimensions if it is to deserve our credence.

We have seen how the skeptical challenge is formulated. Nyāya philosophers seek a reasoned response, one that speaks to the three sorts of epistemic defect that allegedly undermine the traditional authority of the Vedas. It is, first of all, not the case that some Vedic declarations are falsified by observation, for in any case in which the prescribed result does not occur, this can be accounted for by “imperfections” in the performance of the prescribed act. Specifically, the imperfection might lie with the actual conduct of the act, with the methods and materials used, or with the mental state of the performer (*karma-kartr-sādhana-vaiguṇāt*; NS 2.1.58). The everyday application of practical reason again provides the model. Vātsyāyana gives as an illustration the following humdrum means-end rule: “Someone who desires fire should rub together pieces of wood.” Someone’s inability to so produce fire does nothing to falsify this maxim, but merely demonstrates that something has gone wrong in its execution. The Nyāya discussion here is highly reminiscent of Austin’s account of “performative misfires” (Austin 1975), a theory that has indeed been applied to ritual practice (Tambiah 1979). One might worry that the strategy of appealing to performative misfires will also save the most obviously fallacious of practical maxims and render even magical rites immune to observational disconfirmation. The correct response to this claim is that the purpose of invoking this strategy is only to show that the objection that Vedic scripture is untrustworthy (because it is empirically false) rests on an unestablished premise; its purpose is not to demonstrate the actual assent-worthiness of any given maxim, mundane or scriptural.

Apparent inconsistencies can always be eliminated by further relativizing the statements. In our example, the Nyāya philosopher suggests that the performance of a sacrifice after sunrise is decreed only for someone who has already resolved to perform it before sunrise, and so on (NS 2.1.59). Another technique is to argue that there is no genuine incompatibility, that is to say, no example where the very same act is both prescribed and prohibited, under exactly the same conditions and circumstances. Again, repetition is only a fault if it serves no purpose, and an important distinction is

drawn between the uselessly repetitive (*abhyāsa*) and the pragmatically useful repetition (*anuvāda*; NS 2.1.60). In other words, there are pragmatic conversational functions that can be achieved through speech-acts of repetition; it is not always the equivalent of drunken rambling. For example, there is a clear utility in repeatedly urging someone to go faster (NS 2.1.67).

Skepticism about the Vedas' epistemological credentials was grounded in the application to them of a discursive analysis appropriate to ordinary speech and communication. In its place, the Nyāya-sūtra, borrowing from Mīmāṃsā hermeneutical theory, provides a systematization of Vedic discourse in terms of three functional categories: imperative (*vidhi*), explanatory scholium (*arthavāda*), and pragmatically valuable repetition (*anuvāda*) (NS 2.1.62). Couching the Vedas in an analytical framework that preserves their discursive autonomy does nothing, however, to attest to their assent-worthiness. As Vātsyāyana clearly states, "undermining the critical refutation is not itself sufficient to demonstrate the assent-worthiness of religious language" (*kim punah pratishedhahetūddhārād eva śabdasya pramānatvam siddhyati? na*; NBh 96, 11). Further argumentation is needed.

What we might think of as the most obvious argument, namely that the statements in the religious canon are assent-worthy because they are in origin the revealed word of a non-deceptive divinity, is striking by its absence in the texts I am considering. Indeed, the dialectic at this point moves between two Hindu schools, one of which, Nyāya, locates all assent-worthiness in the epistemic credentials of the speaker, while the other, Mīmāṃsā, attempts to derive Vedic assent-worthiness from the alleged "eternality" of the Vedic texts. Mīmāṃsā philosophers claim that the allegedly impeccable epistemic credentials of Vedic pronouncements could not be secured if they had an origin, for nothing that has the nature of a composed work is intrinsically immune to error. Nyāya philosophers, on the other hand, claim that that religious epistemology of testimony is continuous with other branches of testimonially transmitted knowledge and that the epistemic credentials of Vedic discourse must be accounted for by appeal to the same rational principles that apply in other areas. We might indeed suspect that in this dialectic the term "assent-worthiness" (*prāmānya*) is being used with different grammars. A Naiyāyika might want to claim that it makes no sense to say that Vedic assertions are eternal, in the way we do say that atoms are eternal or space is eternal. Certainly, they do not regard it as obligatory to demonstrate that the Vedas are intrinsically immune to error. Rather, the Vedas fall within the space of reason precisely because or insofar as one can intelligibly regard their claim to our assent as an instance of the general phenomenon of assent-worthiness in speech.

So Nyāya-sūtra 2.1.68: "Just as with the [contrasting?] assent-worthiness of medical treatises and of mantras, the assent-worthiness of this [the Veda] is a function of the credibility of the testifier." This is not meant to provide a definition of textual assent-worthiness, but rather a criterion for it. According to the commentators, a statement is assent-worthy if and only if it is true, and testifiers command our assent if they are sincere, benevolent, and have a "direct knowledge" of things (*sākṣātkṛtadharmatā*). In other words, the following is proposed as a *sui generis* epistemic norm in the ethics of belief: One should give one's assent to the assertions of a well-motivated expert. Applying this general principle to the Vedas, what it states is that one should assent to the declarations of those seers, prophets, and wise men who are particularly insightful in

the matters with which the Vedas are concerned and who are benevolent in their dealings with others. A later Naiyāyika, Vācaspati, will, to be sure, import a theological dimension to this discussion and identify the credible testifier with God; even then, it is not God's peculiar authority that explains the rationality of religious belief, but rather the derivation of religious epistemology from more general epistemic principles. Nothing in the above argument by itself implies that there has to be a single, ultimate, Vedic expert, any more than there needs to be, in medicine, a unique ultimate source of medical expertise. As in any branch of knowledge, expertise is distributed and skills are pooled.

The larger issue here has to do with the implied conception of the relationship between religion and reason. In framing the terms of the debate about scriptural authority as they have, the Nyāya philosophers have also, it might appear, sided with those who think that religion can and must be made subject to reason, and against those who see religion and reason as belonging to logically distinct domains of human endeavor. In Europe, the early Enlightenment separation of philosophy and theology took the form of a commitment to the second of these positions. Spinoza, for example, argued that what he called the “fundamental principle of theology,” namely that “men are saved by obedience alone,” can neither be proved nor refuted by the use of reason (1670, p. 191), and he criticized both those who think that “Scripture must be adapted to reason” (p. 186), the first of whom, he claimed, was Maimonides, as well as those who, still failing to separate philosophy from theology, believe that “reason should be a servant of Scripture” (p. 186). Of such people, Spinoza asks, “What altar of refuge can a man find for himself when he commits treason against the majesty of reason?” (p. 194). Among the various members of the Hindu group, a lively debate occurs about the relative epistemological priority of reason and scripture, some espousing subordination, others adaptation, but few seeking the total separation of which Spinoza speaks. Early modern Nyāya, however, does move toward a position resembling European deism, admitting rational proofs for the existence of a supreme being (*īśvara*) but diminishing the role of “revealed” religion (see Vattanky 1984).

I have discussed the analysis by certain Hindu philosophers of scriptural veracity (*śabdapramāṇya*) and the relation between an appeal to scripture and the use of reason. A fuller discussion would certainly need to examine the work of other members of the Hindu family: early and later Sāṃkhya, the Yoga-sūtra of Patañjali, Advaita Vedānta and Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, controversies within Mīmāṃsā, *bhakti*, the Upanisads, the theoretical outlook of the epic Mahābhārata and Rāmāyana, the later Nyāya theistic proofs, and the role of *adrsta* in Vaiśeṣika, to name but a few.

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## 2

# Buddhism

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This chapter outlines the philosophical problems that have seemed most urgent to Buddhist thinkers, together with the kinds of answers they have found persuasive.

### Tradition and Sources

Buddhism began in India with the birth of Gautama Sakyamuni, the Buddha, about 500 years before Christ. While it effectively ceased to exist in most of the Indian sub-continent by the twelfth century CE, it had by then spread through almost all of South, Central, and East Asia. It remains a significant presence in many parts of Asia (and has seen a revival in India since independence), though the effects of European colonialism since the sixteenth century, and of the Communist revolutions of the twentieth, have on the whole been negative.

Buddhist philosophers have therefore done their work in a wide variety of languages and cultural settings. There is a massive amount of material available in the imperial and canonical languages of Pali, Chinese, Tibetan, Korean, and Japanese; some literary remnants of a once-flourishing Sanskrit Buddhist philosophical tradition; and much work in a variety of South and Central Asian vernaculars. Only a tiny proportion of this body of work has been translated into European languages, and even less has been given serious study by European or American philosophers. This situation creates some difficulties. The first is that of fragmentary and partial knowledge: we do not know as much as we should in order to make responsible generalizations about Buddhist philosophical concerns. And the second is that of internal variety: the Buddhist tradition is, if anything, even more differentiated than the Christian; while it may be difficult to see what unites (or even connects) Origen and Jonathan Edwards, philosophically speaking, it is even more difficult to see what unites or connects Buddhaghosa (a philosopher working in Sri Lanka about 1,500 years ago) with Nichiren (a philosopher working in Japan about 700 years ago) – even though both are Buddhist. These difficulties should be borne in mind when reading what follows, and it should also be noted that what is said here is drawn more from Indo-Tibetan materials than from Sino-Japanese ones.



## Ontology

Buddhist philosophers typically think of themselves as arguing for a middle way between extremes, whether of asceticism and indulgence in matters of the flesh, determinism and randomness in causal relations, or eternalism and nihilism in ontology. The necessity of steering a course between the members of this last pair – the view on the one hand that everything exists just as it seems, eternally and without change; and on the other that nothing at all exists – provides Buddhist philosophers with their main impulse toward systematic ontology. The rubric usually used to direct this enterprise is the claim that everything (or at least almost everything; there are some difficulties here) is impermanent, which is typically taken to mean that in so far as anything exists at all, it has both a beginning and an end in time, and that the amount of time separating these two events is very small. Ratnakirti, an eleventh-century Indian Buddhist philosopher, provides a systematic and classical defense of one version of this basic insight (for a translation see McDermott 1970).

This claim as to impermanence is not of merely conceptual or academic interest to Buddhist philosophers. On it is thought to hang much of strictly religious significance, for if you get your ontology wrong, if you misconstrue the nature of what exists, you are very likely also to have improper emotional reactions to your misconstruals: to become excessively attached to what is (falsely) thought to be beginninglessly and endlessly desirable (God, perhaps; or other human persons), which is eternalism; or to despair at the (mistaken) judgment that there exists nothing at all, which is nihilism. One result of such conceptual mistakes will be continued rebirth and redeath in the cycle of Samsara, and a concomitant failure to reach Nirvana. The claim that everything is impermanent, then, is an initial step in the development of an ontology that will be accurate and that will as a result foster a properly dispassionate emotional condition. But it is a claim capable of numerous construals. Four have been influential among Buddhist philosophers, and to varying degrees they all remain so.

The first is an attempt to develop an atomistic ontology according to which every existent occupies the smallest amount of space possible and lasts for the shortest amount of time possible. These existents were called by the Sanskrit term *dharma* in India, where this ontology was first systematized, and both the theory and the texts in which it was expressed are often referred to by the name *abhidharma*. Its most influential exposition may be found in a work called *Abhidharmakosa* (“Treasury of Abhidharma”), probably composed in India in the fourth century CE by Vasubandhu (for a translation see Pruden 1988–90). According to this theory, objects that appear to be extended in space or to last longer than an instant are in fact composed of collocations of *dharma*s, either aggregated in space or strung together causally through time. Further, proponents of this ontology are typically interested in providing a catalog or list of the kinds of *dharma* there are, and then of accounting for medium-sized physical objects – trees, say, or tables – in terms of the different kinds of *dharma* that may be found aggregated or connected causally in them. A typical list is fairly short, containing between 50 and 150 categories, including items such as tangibility, shape/color, perception, memory, and anger. Such lists are meant to be exhaustive, to provide a catalog of every kind of existent, and as a result also to make it possible to account for everything ordinarily

perceived and thought to exist – things such as human persons, stars, and holes in the ground. Both mental and physical phenomena are included in the *dharma* lists.

An ontology of this sort immediately suggests some problems. First, it requires a sophisticated causal theory, for if all ordinary objects of sensory perception are to be accounted for in terms of causal interaction among *dharma*s, a tremendously complex account of even the simplest of events will be needed. And Buddhist philosophers have in fact developed an appropriately nuanced and subtle (if unwieldy) causal theory, often using the ancient twelvefold formula of dependent co-origination (*pratitya-samutpada*) as a starting point (Lamotte 1958, pp. 23–53, provides the details). Second, there are difficulties with the idea of something that exists for an irreducibly small amount of time and takes up an irreducibly small amount of space. If a *dharma* takes up any space at all, or lasts for any time at all, why can it not be further subdivided into existents that take up less time and space? Third, how can disputes as to just which categories are needed to give the shortest possible comprehensive list of kinds of existents (Are 50 categories needed? Or 100? Should memory be an item on the list or not?) be resolved? And fourth, might not the attribution of real (if transient) existence to the *dharma*s offend against the basic philosophico-religious insight that one's ontology should not foster improper attachments? These difficulties contributed to the development of other construals of the basic claim that everything is impermanent, for example the one discussed below.

The second influential construal is that associated with thinkers belonging to the Madhyamaka ("Middle") school of thought, among whom the Indian philosopher Nagarjuna, who may have lived in the first or second century CE, is considered the founder (for a translation of one of his works see Bhattacharya 1986). Nagarjuna, and his followers and commentators in India, Tibet, and China, argued that the pluralistic atomism of the defenders of *dharma* theory has internal problems of the kinds mentioned, and that the basic philosophical insight that everything is impermanent should be interpreted much more radically in order to avoid these difficulties. This Madhyamaka radicalization makes central use of the dialectical arguments associated with the idea of emptiness (*sunyata*). These arguments try to show that every version of realism, every view that assumes or tries to show that there are individuable and describable entities possessed of defining characteristics that make them what they are and not something else, is either *prima facie* incoherent or can be shown by argument to issue in incoherence. This, it is said, is just as true of an ontology based upon *dharma*s as it is of one based upon the idea that there are enduring substances; and so all ontologies of these kinds had better be dropped. An added advantage, according to this way of thinking, is that such a radical rejection of realism will do even more than *dharma* theory to dispose of inappropriate emotional responses issuing from ontological misconceptions. This second ontological construal is not, according to its understanding of itself, nihilism; it is, rather, an attempt at a principled rejection of the language of existence and non-existence. To say that everything is empty is not to deny that there is anything so much as to say that all attempts to catalog and define what there is will necessarily issue in incoherence.

Yet a third ontological position agrees with the Madhyamaka rejection of the realistic pluralism of the *dharma* theorists, but differs from it in affirming the final reality of a single category: that of mind. So this broadly idealistic construal differs from that of



the emptiness theorists principally in that it is willing to state a positive ontology. According to most defenders of the mind-only ontology there are two main reasons to prefer this construal. First, it is not subject to the internal difficulties of *dharma* theory; much emphasis is typically placed here upon the difficulty of coherently explaining the idea of a partless spatially or temporally extended object, which is what a *dharma* must be. And second – or so argue the defenders of the view – it is possible to give a coherent and complete account of human experience without being forced to appeal to external mind-independent objects. Much is made here of dream-experience: if it is characteristic of mind-independent objects that they appear to be located at particular places and times, that they are intersubjectively available, and that they have direct and apparently physical effects upon those who come into contact with them (for a classical statement of these points see Anacker 1984, pp. 161–75), then all these things can be true of objects that everyone agrees to be mental, such as dream images. Why then, given the internal difficulties in doing so, postulate any mind-independent objects at all? The simplest coherent position, according to this construal, is the view that there is only mind. This position, or family of positions, also has its internal difficulties and tensions; but it has been and remains one of the more important construals of the basic ontological intuition.

There is yet a fourth ontological construal. It too, like the other three, claims to be founded upon the basic intuition, but it has a more difficult time than the others in showing this to be the case. This is because this view focuses upon a set of changeless facts about the cosmos, and as a result appears to run directly contrary to the claim that everything is impermanent. Adherents of this construal tend to say that everything that exists has the potential to become fully awakened, to become Buddha; or to say that there is some sense in which everything that exists already is awakened, already is Buddha (on which view see Ruegg 1989; and Griffiths 1994). It is likely that this ontological position grew out of, or is in some way significantly related to, speculation about the nature and properties of the Buddha. For if, as many Buddhist philosophers say, Buddha is strictly omniscient, and if this means that Buddha has directly present to its awareness all states of affairs, then there must be some sense in which this infinite set of states of affairs can be known atemporally (see Chapter 28, Omniscience). But it can also be shown that this fourth construal is not logically incompatible with the claim that everything is impermanent; for by applying a theory of types it is easy to show that the state of affairs picked out by the claim *everything is impermanent* is not itself impermanent, but rather permanent. And in similar fashion, the claim *everything is already and always Buddha*, it can be argued, is not obviously or directly incompatible with the claim that everything is impermanent, but is instead a restatement of the implications of that claim.

These four construals of the fundamental ontological intuition have provided, and continue to provide, the main options in Buddhist ontology. Their terms are the terms of most Buddhist philosophizing in this area, and it should be clear from what little has been said in this discussion that they provide much scope for fruitful and interesting philosophical debate: a strong proponent of the claim that everything is always already awakened is likely to have much to say in disagreement with a strong proponent of *dharma* theory.

## Epistemology and Philosophy of Language

According to Buddhist ontology things are not as they seem. Any ontology whose upshot is such a view must work to develop an epistemology and a theory of language that cohere with it, for the ordinary commonsense versions of both these enterprises tend to assume, to the contrary, that things are pretty much as they seem, and that human languages as ordinarily used can get rather close to accurate and adequate description of the way things are (see Chapter 41, Religious Language). Buddhist philosophers, constrained by this necessity, put a lot of effort into elaborating epistemological and linguistic theories that will do the job they need done.

To take philosophy of language first, Buddhists tend to exhibit a deep suspicion of language, and its correlate, concept formation. One form of this suspicion – perhaps the most extreme form – is evident in the attempt by some (especially those versed in Madhyamaka modes of thought) to engage in philosophical argumentation without making any substantive claims, but rather only by laying bare the contradictions present in or entailed by those put forth by others. But this proved a controversial strategy even among Buddhists, and still more so among their non-Buddhist interlocutors and debaters in India and China. The chief issue here was whether the view “I have no philosophical views” is itself a philosophical view, and, if it is, whether it does not fall victim to a common but damaging form of self-referential incoherence. This debate surfaces already in the work of Nagarjuna (Bhattacharya 1986, pp. 107–14), and thereafter becomes a standard part of philosophical debate in this tradition of reasoning.

But there are other ways to treat and elaborate this suspicion of language and concept. Some Buddhists deploy a distinction between two kinds of truth, one which operates at the level of appearance and talks of such things as tables, chairs, and persons, and the other, which transcends language and conceptual distinctions altogether, and issues finally in silence. Others use a theory of the relations between words and things that makes such relations always indirect: using a term such as “cow,” for instance, does not on this view involve any reference to a particular cow, nor to the presence of the universal “cowness” present in some particular. Instead it removes or excludes from consideration all non-cows (on this theory see Hayes 1988).

Epistemologically speaking, Buddhists had not only to develop a theory that would explain why the ordinary means of gaining knowledge are misleading, but also one that would explain how the errors produced by deployment of these ordinary means might be corrected. One important move here is the development of arguments against regarding certain common belief-forming practices as productive of knowledge. In India, epistemological debates centered around the enumeration and definition of the belief-forming practices that should be thought of as authoritative, as capable of producing knowledge. Many non-Buddhist philosophers in India recognize at least three of these: sensory perception, reasoning, and testimony. Buddhists typically allow only the first two, and even these they tend to redescribe in ways that radically limit their knowledge-producing capacity. Sensory perception, for instance, is separated definitionally from any connection with concept or language: the bare percept may indeed

produce knowledge (better, it is an instance of the occurrence of knowledge, on which see Hattori 1968), but any attempt to classify or categorize its phenomenal properties, its qualia, will not be an instance of knowledge. And since perceptual acquaintance with medium-sized physical objects always involves such classificatory activity, it follows that such acquaintance is never knowledge – and this takes us back to the fundamental ontological intuition already noted.

Reasoning is thought of as a knowledge-producing instrument in two senses. First, under the rubric of “reasoning for others,” it can demonstrate the fallacies in the arguments of others, and to this end Buddhist philosophers in India, Tibet, and China developed a complex system of analyzing and classifying logical fallacies (Randle 1930, pp. 147–303, provides some details). Their interests in doing this appear to have been in part formal and in part polemical, which is to say that they were interested both in the development of systems and in the sharpening of tools for winning arguments. But it is certainly true that the system thus developed rivals in complexity the systems of logic and argument developed in medieval Europe. The second major function of reasoning (called “reasoning for oneself”) is to provide action guides, whether in day-to-day interaction with the physical world, or in more abstruse matters of meditational practice or ethical decision making. If, on seeing that there is smoke on the mountain, for instance, one wants to know whether there is also likely to be fire there (perhaps in order to guide one’s decisions as to proper places for meditating or monastery-building), one will need to use an inference schema (there is smoke on the mountain; wherever there’s smoke there’s fire; so there’s fire on the mountain) in order to come to a decision. And so Buddhist philosophers have devoted a good deal of attention to the formal analysis of arguments of this sort, even though they typically do not judge that the objects with which such reasoning is concerned (mountains and the like) have any final reality.

## Persons

The ontological intuition that everything is impermanent is taken by Buddhist philosophers to apply to human persons as much as to anything else. Indeed, they often present the claim *there are no enduring selves* as the philosophico-religious claim that is more distinctive of Buddhism than any other. The claim does not, of course, amount to a denial that there are persons, that part of the ordinary experience of us humans is a sense that we are subjects perceiving objects, that we endure through time, and that each of us is significantly different from other such centers of identity and action. But it does amount to a strong claim that some construals of these phenomenal facts are deeply mistaken, and, moreover, that giving one’s assent to such a mistaken construal is a deeply damaging error, one that will likely prevent those who make it from acting properly and will certainly prevent them from advancing toward Nirvana.

The usual construal of the phenomenal facts indicated is that each human person is an enduring entity: that my past and future are mine and not yours, that while I certainly seem to myself to have had a beginning in time (and may have an end in time), I nonetheless have had a continuous history since then, and as a result am justified in thinking of myself as an entity with both essential and accidental properties. But

all, or almost all, of this is mistaken according to classical Buddhist philosophy. The truth, by contrast, is that what is picked out by my personal proper name (and yours, and everyone's) is only a collocation of events, connected causally but without any enduring or persisting entity on which these events may be predicated. Usually, the events that constitute a person are said to be of five kinds: physical events, and events of sensation, conceptualization, volition, and consciousness. An exhaustive analysis of what constitutes a person at a particular time can then be given by listing the events of these kinds that are occurring at that time. There is no further fact, no possessor of these events. The past and future of the person in question can be described by tracing the precursors of these events backward in time and by projecting them forward.

Arguments for this view usually proceed on two fronts. The first begins with phenomenology and ends with logic. It is said that the fivefold analysis of kinds of event mentioned above describes a set of facts open to discovery by dispassionate introspection: that close examination of what goes on in the continua of events that we call human persons will reveal events of these kinds and will reveal nothing else. The introspection intended, naturally, is usually guided by instruction in meditational techniques that are precisely designed to reveal these kinds of events and no others, and this is a significant weakness in the argument, which requires for its full force that unmanipulated bare experience will reveal just and only these facts. Nevertheless, Buddhist arguments on this topic normally assert the phenomenological claim as if it were unproblematic. Coupled with the phenomenological claim is a set of logical arguments. These ask those who would wish to assert that there is more to human persons than the phenomenal facts mentioned to explain the relation between the postulated further fact – a soul, perhaps, or some other kind of nonphysical substance – and these phenomenal facts. Perhaps the soul is the possessor of these phenomena, or their controller, or the whole of which they are parts, or the like. In the classical texts devoted to this topic (see, for example, Huntington 1989, pp. 170–7), attempts are made to give an exhaustive list of the relations that could obtain between postulated soul and the phenomenal facts of personhood, and to show that no such relations either are or can be coherently accounted for. The upshot of such arguments is taken to be that there are no enduring selves, though there are certainly phenomenal persons.

The second front upon which arguments for the non-existence of enduring selves proceed is a broadly ethical one. Having the view that there are enduring selves makes, it is said, the practice of the Buddhist path impossible. Briefly, the point is this: if you judge that you are an enduring entity, that you have a past and a future, you are very likely to be interested in that past and that future in ways that make it effectively impossible for you to be properly interested in the past and future of other sentient beings. You will be self-interested in ethically improper ways. If the goal is to have a compassionate attitude (and the actions that ought to accompany it) directed without distinction to all instances of suffering, then the view that sentient beings are genuinely (substantively) distinct from one another will make this difficult. The toothache that you think you are likely to have next week will be of greater concern to you than the toothache that your best friend will have, and of much greater concern than your enemy's. From this basic mistake about the nature of persons, it is argued, spring all the most damaging ethical offenses.

This view of persons creates some interesting difficulties of a strictly philosophical kind. The two most obvious are the difficulty of giving an account of the process of death and rebirth if there is no enduring self to die and be reborn. And the second is the difficulty of combining this view of persons with standard Asian views about karma, ideas that require, or seem to require, that the agent of a particular action be the same as the agent who experiences the results of that action at some time in the future. Dealing with these difficulties has given, and still gives, Buddhist philosophers much to do.

## God

If God is thought of as Jews, Christians, Muslims, and some Hindus typically think of him – as the eternal, changeless, omniscient, omnipotent, unsurpassably benevolent creator of all that is – then most Buddhist philosophers have little time for him (see Chapter 27, Omnipotence; Chapter 28, Omniscience; and Chapter 30, Goodness). More precisely, the time they do have for him is mostly spent on developing arguments whose conclusion is that there can be no such being, and that it would be a bad thing if there were. Buddhist arguments against the coherence of the very idea of God will be largely familiar to philosophers of religion whose work has been within the ambit of the Abrahamic traditions. There are criticisms of the standard positive theistic arguments, notably of the argument from design; but there are also criticisms of the coherence of the claim, for example, that God knows events in time and acts in time, but is not himself subject to change (for a classical example see Jha 1986, pp. 68–100).

But there are equally deep and pressing ethical arguments on this question. If God is thought to be eternal and unchanging, as well as unsurpassably compassionate and loving toward human beings, and if, moreover, he is capable of delivering us from our miseries simply by his free choice so to do, then, in Buddhist eyes, we are unlikely to develop the mental and moral discipline we shall need in order to follow the Buddhist path to its end. God will become for us an object of such fascination that we are likely to spend all our time in contemplation of his glories, an activity that will foster in us emotional states of no help to us. Even if God could exist, then we ought not to believe in him, much less worship him. None of this is to say that there are not many minor deities, beings who may be very powerful, almost unimaginably more powerful and knowledgeable than humans. Buddhist cosmology requires that there be many such; the standard stories about Sakyamuni's own awakening to Buddhahood involve the participation of at least two major deities. But these beings are not God in the Christian sense. They, like us, are subject to delusion and passion, and, so the argument goes, they must follow the same path that we must follow if they are ultimately to be liberated from their sufferings. Buddhism has been characterized quite aptly not as atheism but rather as trans-polytheism.

But there is a peculiar irony here. While on the one hand Buddhist philosophers are keen to reject the idea and the actuality of God, on the other they devote a great deal of intellectual energy to considering Buddha, to developing theories of what Buddha must really be like in order to have done the things the tradition claims him to have done. And as this intellectual tradition develops it comes to look more and more like

what Christians have called “theology” in the sense of reasoned discourse about God. Buddha comes to be seen as omniscient, omnipotent, and even as coextensive with the limits of the cosmos. And the arguments in support of these views about the nature of Buddha often look very like Christian discussions of the attributes of God. Sometimes the tension between the rejection of theism and a strong view of the nature of Buddha is dramatic, as when a single thinker spends time demolishing arguments about God’s omniscience and then resurrects what look like very similar arguments whose conclusion is that Buddha is omniscient (for example, Jha 1986, pp. 68–100, 1391–579). Theology, understood as ordered and systematic reasoning about what a maximally significant being must be like, here makes a re-entry even when the door has apparently been firmly closed against it.

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# Chinese Confucianism and Daoism

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One problem Chinese philosophical thought raises for philosophy of religion is that it raises so few of the familiar philosophy of religion problems. This is awkward because we class Confucianism and Daoism among the world's major religions and philosophies. We have little trouble, of course, identifying popular religions in China with the usual panoply of ghosts, spirits, and magic. Arguably, however, neither of the philosophical movements has a theology – a theory of the divine. Both are naturalistic, although their conception of “nature” is not the modern scientific one. They invite us to reflect on how our Western conception of “religion” is dominated by the model of metaphysical duality – the contrast with the supernatural. This article will first touch on the problems of conception, then outline some interpretative puzzles surrounding the chief candidates for Chinese philosophical counterparts of the divine: *tian* (nature) and *dao* (way), and finally undertake a narrative exploration of some of the vague analogues of familiar issues in philosophy of religion: evil, fatalism, divine command morality, religiosity, and absolute simplicity.

## The Problem of Definition

This problem arises because if we compare Confucianism and Daoism with our conceptual stereotype of religiosity, we may doubt that Daoism and Confucianism are religions (on different grounds from similar doubt about Buddhist philosophical theory – although again we have no trouble finding credulous Buddhist communities everywhere). If we accept the present use of “religion” to include these Chinese instances, then we must revise our definition to accommodate what turns out to be true of them. The contrasts underscore the historical theory that Western religions flow from a common Indo-European origin. Our shared notion of religion emphasizes theology: we identify religions primarily with what they believe in, especially beyond naturalistic contents.

A typical Indo-European theology has doctrines of pneumatology (theory of spirit), soteriology (theory of salvation), eschatology (theory of the beginning and end), and anthropology (theory of human nature). Western religious scholarship often treats these theological motivations as natural, universal reflective urges. The Chinese



examples suggest that such speculative religiosity is a learned cultural inheritance, not a universal urge. Universal religious questions may turn out to be highly nebulous.

Classical Chinese philosophy shows no signs of creation myths, of attempts to explain “why we are here,” of a mind/body (or spirit/body) dichotomy, or of supernaturalism. Full-fledged creation stories seem not to have circulated until the end of the classical period of thought after contact with Buddhism. The “spirits” of popular Chinese religion live after the body, but are not immortal or immaterial. The same *qi* (matter) that makes up the rest of the world is in spirit. Spirit *qi* dissipates over time. The world reabsorbs it. “Spirit” explains the energizing of the body, but not its motivation or cognition. Chinese philosophers dealt mostly with the problems of a naturalistic ethics (moral psychology and meta-ethics) and political theory. Their myths depicted mortal exemplars of moral wisdom (sage kings) who invented language, morality, and culture and transmitted them to us.

The anthropological division of religions into prophetic, ritualistic, and mystical helps justify the inclusion of Chinese schools among religions. Their non-theological character merely signals that the prophetic variety, which dominates Indo-European religions, is absent in China. Confucian religious content counts as “ritualist” and the usual place for Daoism (along with its Buddhist incarnation, Zen) is “mystical.” Our problem recurs, though, if we then pose questions that put a prophetic frame around all religious types: “What do mystics believe?”

Popular Confucian and Daoist religious practices pose no special classification problems. Both have temples, priests, rituals, and scriptural texts. Interpreting the associated philosophical texts poses the problems. Many scholars draw a sharp distinction between religious and philosophical Daoism and treat the former as bowdlerizing the philosophy. The religious form of Confucianism seems more integrated with the philosophy partly because most scholars accept that Confucianism developed from an early religion and has a non-skeptical commitment to traditional ritual forms (as well as the authority of the sage kings).

The teachings of Confucius (551–479 BCE) focused on its core religious feature – ritual. Some tenuously link Confucianism to the ancient religion of ancestor worship. They do share a familial focus. Classical texts, however, did not rationalize ancestor worship itself except for encouraging ritual practice in general. Confucius is famous for his pragmatically “agnostic” replies to questions about spirits and the afterlife. “Until you know about life, how can you know about death?”

## Problems of Interpretation

The problem of definition links up with the interpretative controversies. If we map Chinese ideographs onto Indo-European religious concepts, we will then find a familiar “implicit” theology. The controversy, of course, is whether to use a translation map with that implication. I am more interested in how Chinese thought forces us to broaden our conceptions of intellectual possibility. This chapter will, therefore, highlight the contrasts and challenge to the missionary mappings.

Missionaries facilitated the Western introduction to Chinese thought. Convinced of their rationality, natural theology liberals charitably assumed the Chinese must have

a concept of God – the problem was identifying it. (Conservatives simply declared the Chinese “atheists.”) One liberal assumption was that *tian* (nature:sky, typically translated “heaven”) is the Confucian “God” while the *dao* plays that role for the Daoists. The two mappings raise different but related difficulties. I will start with *tian* and use it to explain the development of a Daoist *dao*.

Many historical scholars assume that *tian* had been an anthropomorphic god prior to the philosophical period. It is clear that *tian* was a source of normative legitimacy and, in the official dynastic religion, an object of prayer and royal sacrifice. Ancients considered *tian* a crucial ally in political rivalries. None of this entails that *tian* is anthropomorphic or supernatural. Its use in other contexts marks it as sky in contrast to earth and natural in contrast to social or conventional. If we do not start with the assumption that the Chinese must have a God concept, the obvious alternative possibility is that they worshiped, obeyed, and were in awe of nature – particularly the constant nature of celestial movement. Where this awe leads Indo-European theology to postulate and worship a transcendent cause of the natural world, Chinese “awe” arguably stays put in nature.

*Tian* emerges into philosophy in the doctrine of the “mandate of Heaven” (*tian* [nature:sky] *ming* [name:command]). The doctrine justified political legitimacy, military success, and revolution. The last element marks its most striking contrast with the divine right of kings. When the dynastic family loses its *de* (virtuosity) (the normal eventuality), *tian-ming* justifies rebellion by someone with more *de*. Some signals of such a loss are that the people abandon the ruler, his soldiers defect rather than fight, and the weather, luck, choice of general strategy, and so forth bring about his defeat in battle.

The crucial evidence of the shift of the mandate to another family is, conversely, the new family’s winning and effectively assuming authority. The detailed mechanism of transfer of the mandate is consistent with a secular notion of “natural” legitimacy – particularly so since it eschews a permanent, hereditary aristocracy. A peasant family can become a dynasty if they have sufficient *de*.

A political *dao* (guide) ties the mandate to the “natural” social order. It derives from actions that preserve it and is lost by the opposite. The model ruler’s way is the way societies work in the natural world. Later, more superstitious, versions suggested that being out of harmony with the natural order could trigger freak phenomena. Confucian advisors manipulated supersitious rulers by identifying bizarre events (ducks flying backward, two-headed calves) as portents that the ruler’s policies were alienating the mandate.

## Nature and Convention

The theoretical complement of *tian* was conventional society. Ancient thinkers contrasted the realms of *tian* and *ren* (human), not supernatural-natural. Social conventions that were consistent with nature should be constant. Disputes raged over how much variation this left to social construction. Did nature dictate a single constant *dao* or could we choose our guiding system from a range of workable alternatives for utilitarian or moral purposes?

Confucians, with their adoration of the traditional and partly mythical sage kings, tended toward a more religious (authoritarian and revealed) answer. Morally motivated mortals created the original (and still correct) conventions (the *li* [ritual]). For Confucians, the moral issue was how to recover and follow the guidance of these culture heroes.

Other schools, including Daoism, tended to be more skeptical of convention and more pluralistic. Gradually Daoism came to question even the authority of *tian* itself – a development marked in the claim that Daoism abandons *tian* as an authority in favor of *dao*. Exactly what that amounts to raises similar interpretative problems.

One of the tempting ways to understand the slogan is that Daoists came to regard the whole range of competing *daos* as equally “natural.” *Tian* has no preference among the competing *daos* and, thus, offers no effective guidance separate from the *daos* themselves. When we select among them, we must do so by reference to some prior guiding perspective (a *dao*) and its standards of right and wrong. We find no natural guidance apart from *daos*.

The alternative (and dominant) view is the assumption that the word *dao* changed meaning when used by Daoists. Confucians referred thereby to moral systems, but Daoists used it as the name of the supernatural, divine, creator of the world – a mystical “God.” The problem is that the claimed properties of the alleged transcendent object follow mainly from the interpretative hypothesis.

## Transcendence

The debate often turns to the question of “transcendence.” This formulation, however, adds little clarity. *Tian* is far from a clear case of something metaphysically separate from the natural world and, unless we accept the meaning-change assumption, so is *dao*. Notoriously, Chinese thought avoids the metaphysical gulf between mind and body that informs one Indo-European conception of transcendence (non-location in time and space). Some cite the presence of moral doctrines as evidence of transcendence, but I know of no sound argument that morality must be non-natural – certainly none in early Chinese thought.

The case for a transcendent concept in *Daoism* (the mystical *dao*) comes from assorted “creation” passages. They say that *daos* support, sustain, and even create things. Paradoxically, however, these passages explain that *daos* give birth to “non-existence” which gives rise to “existence,” or to “one” which creates “two,” then “three!”

Obviously these passages do not force us to impute a transcendent creator (see Chapter 37, Creation and Conservation) to interpret *dao*. If *daos* are forms of natural ways, we can read the passages as committed only to some counterpart of scientific theory – the process leading from the big bang and evolution to natural kinds in the world. If, on the other hand, we focus on the moral doctrine interpretation of *dao*, we can read such passages as a version of linguistic idealism. Concepts (e.g., being and non-being) are conventionally “carved out” for practical purposes by our guiding discourse. We can view *daos* creating and sustaining “things” as blending this idealism with the commonsense view that a natural “guide” nurtures and develops things.

Both explanations of “things” would fail if they relied on the claim that Daoists ground their religion on a mystical experience (see Chapter 48, Religious Experience). Further, there is almost no evidence of a concept of “experience” (which typically informs a mind/body distinction), let alone of any clear reference to such experiences in the texts. An interesting view of language, however, fuels this interpretation.

Chinese thinkers, especially Daoists, have viewed language as consisting of “names” which mark distinctions (is  $x$ /is not  $x$ ). Linguistic idealists fallaciously conclude that since the distinctions are conventional, natural reality must lack distinctions. Hence, language distorts the way things are. This claimed consequence of linguistic idealism generates paradox, but we can explain its motivation without assuming it depended evidentially on some esoteric experience.

A cluster of thinkers (led by the Confucian idealist Mencius, 371–285 BCE) also claims special access to moral guidance (intuition). They are wary of appeals to convention or tradition and still accept the authority of *tian*. Their view is that we have a natural inclination (if uncorrupted by linguistic guides) to select the situationally correct action for us. This could be a religious doctrine (divine conscience), but the Mencian form is naturalistic. The tendencies that are in our motivational organ (the *xin* [heart-mind]) *tian* produces in harmony with its moral *dao*. Paradoxically, the Daoist thinkers seem to have doubted these “religious” elaborations of the underlying linguistic insight.

## Death and the Afterlife

The absence of theology and pneumatology parallels a lack of soteriology and eschatology. The individual perspective (the conscious subject of experience) plays little role in classical Chinese moral theories. A social focus dominates Chinese philosophy. Their *daos* do project utopian possibilities for society, but have little to do with individual “redemption” separate from social reform. In each utopia we all will lead more fulfilling natural lives. The cosmic feature is simply that the well-ordered society is one in harmony with the world (*tian-di* [sky-earth]). Post-Buddhist Neo-Confucianism has a more individualistic content. It treats becoming a sage (being morally wise enough to succeed) as the counterpart to Buddhist enlightenment and this more personal fulfillment conception makes it more like Western religions.

The popular Chinese religion of ancestor worship presupposes an afterlife “heaven.” One reveres one’s dead ancestors, but they lack supernatural or divine status. On the contrary, ancestors depend on their earthly progeny for basic support. The duties and obligations of natural social relationships thus extend beyond death. We support our ancestors in paradise by sacrifices – from food to “hell money,” houses, and concubines. If the support ends, they are cast out of heaven (non-payment of rent?) to wander on earth, causing trouble.

Religious readings project a “universal” fear of death on Chinese thinkers. Their ways of dealing with it, however, typically range from (1) Confucius’ pragmatic agnosticism, to (2) seeking natural elixirs and practices for “long life,” or (3) reinterpreting it as surviving through one’s moral influence or offspring, or (4) understanding life and death as a continuous and natural process of change in which nothing is really gained

or lost. Chinese thinkers hardly seem to have drawn comfort from claims of the immortality of the spirit.

## Problems of Evil

Its theological character is controversial, but since Chinese thought treats nature as the source of ethics, it generates approximations of some traditional religious puzzles. Confucianism faced two different versions of the problem of evil (see Chapter 58, The Logical Problem of Evil, and Chapter 59, The Evidential Problem of Evil). The first stems from Confucius' "one man" political theory. The premises are: (1) if a sage is in power, then all will develop their moral potential; (2) everyone has the moral potential to become a sage; (3) sage kings (Yao and Shun) were in power in the past. Induction suggests that we are all still sages. We cannot explain why there was ever a descent from the Confucian "golden age."

A metaphysical version plagues the Mencian and Neo-Confucian forms of Confucian idealism. Mencius' theory starts from the premise that human nature is instinctively good. Correct action requires no calculation or theory. Our innate intuition selects the situationally correct action. Neo-Confucians interpret this metaphysically. The stuff (*qi* [matter]) of the universe has moral principle in it. Since the same *qi* makes up our heart-mind, it is morally "tuned" to the universe and will respond to any concrete global situation with the single correct action for "me-here-now."

Parallels with Western puzzles in philosophy of religion emerge if we rephrase the problem of evil as "whatever I do must be God's will." In China the conclusion is "whatever I do, I shall be following the natural *dao*." An early Daoist, Shen Dao, first exposed the problem. He observed that we will follow exactly one actual course (which he called the Great Dao). Nothing, not even a clod of earth, can "miss" it. Since everything will follow the Great Dao, there can be no practical point in learning the distinction between right and wrong. If correct action is following the natural *dao*, then following the actual *dao* is surely enough. He concludes (paradoxically) that we should abandon knowledge. To follow Shen Dao's teaching would be to violate it.

Laozi (fourth century BCE) proffered a primitivist version of a similar theory. He viewed being wrong as being unnatural in the sense of being generated by learning, culture, language, distinctions, rules, and so forth. Natural action requires "forgetting." This also leads to paradox since a theory with distinctions (e.g., between natural and conventional) guides the forgetting, and, like Confucius, it leaves us wanting an explanation for the decline from nature to society.

Zhuangzi (369–286 BCE) points to another problem for idealist Confucians who advocate "cultivating" the heart-mind to achieve this action-selecting ability. Any cultivation presupposes a distinction between a sage's and a fool's heart. Some hearts must be naturally "bad" or out of tune with the universe and require calibration. In that case, one must abandon the intuitive criterion of action in favor of some (probably controversial) moral theory that grades "natural" hearts and dictates how to cultivate ordinary hearts.

The Buddhist inspired Neo-Confucian metaphysics takes a dualistic form – *li* (principle) and *qi* (matter-force). Mencius' optimism translates to the slogan that there is no

*qi* without *li*. So everything in nature conforms to *li* and exists in a global harmony. The moral injunction thus becomes puzzling. Humans should act in a way that contributes to and sustains that metaphysical harmony, but as a part of nature, composed of *qi* and infused with *li*, it is not clear how we could fail. Why are humans, of all species, capable of departing from natural harmony? How can humans fail to be natural? Wang Yang-ming (1472–1529) appears to have toyed with abandoning the distinction between good and evil.

### Fatalism and Free Will?

The problem of fatalism parallels the problem of evil. In both cases the contrast between the two traditions goes beyond mere lack of theology (see Chapter 56, Foreknowledge and Human Freedom). Some theory of causation (creation) usually informs Western conceptions of fatalism. Chinese “fatalism” is an aspect of their normative theory coupled with their naturalism. This makes translators use different terms in rendering the key term *ming* (to name, command) (used in “mandate” of *tian*). Usually they gloss it as “order” or “command,” though most accept the theory that it is the verbal form of *ming* (name). When a text uses it to justify stoic attitudes, however, translators assume it changes meaning and becomes “fate.” Its role, noted above, is to use *tian* as naturally bringing about legitimacy – i.e., “naming” the ruler (and charging him with responsibility).

What is missing is any analog of argument from a creator’s intent, divine foreknowledge, or a concept of deterministic laws. The arguments that usually accompany such uses of *ming* are typically moral nihilism arising from sardonic application of the ideal of “natural” morality. The normal accompaniment of accepting *ming* is that one ceases to make distinctions between *shi* (this, right) and *fei* (not-this, wrong). It is to accept that *tian* or the Great Dao has produced this. A naturalist morality can but cease making judgments about it.

The only form of determinism required here is Shen Dao’s logical determinism (there will be exactly one future course of events) and few philosophers take that line. Laozi follows Shen Dao in advocating that we abandon knowledge, but his apparent motivation is not resignation, but a desire for a different kind of freedom. Laozi focuses on how we free ourselves from social control or distortion of our natural action impulses. “Abandon knowledge” for him is a straightforward normative principle.

No notion in pre-Buddhist Chinese philosophy coincides closely with Indo-European freedom of the will. The closest “value” is that of spontaneous (non-guided, intuitive) action, which, most frequently, Chinese thinkers treat as following nature, not transcending it.

### Divine Command Theory

Some religious puzzles related to morality do translate across the two traditions. The counterpart of a traditional puzzle for divine command morality is: “is there a natural inclination to morality because it is right or is it right because there is a natural



inclination to it?" This becomes a puzzle for Chinese natural moralism, which shares the "'is' implies 'ought'" structure of divine command theory (see Chapter 68, Divine Command Ethics). Confucius started with an authority – tradition. It was religious in being "revealed" in texts surviving from the mythical sages. Their authority, however, rested on mainly epistemic grounds – their wisdom.

Mozi (ca. 470–390 BCE) reflected that Confucians were confusing what was traditional with what was right. His problem was justifying a standard to substitute for tradition. Mozi responded by drawing *tian* more directly into the ethical project. (Many regard his *tian* as more religious than Confucius'.) He argued that *tian* has a preference for benefit over harm (implicitly human benefit). The evidence, as Zhuangzi pointed out later, depended on taking a human point of view. Still, Mozi did note that a natural ethics was a "universal" one – utilitarianism. He contrasted Confucian traditional morality, with its preference for special relations, as "partial." The Confucian attitude, he admitted, was arguably also natural.

Mencius developed the idealist version of Confucianism in response to Mozi's challenge. We discover the preferences of *tian* for humans in the innate structure of our moral psychology – the heart-mind that directs action. He argued that the seeds of compassion, shame, conformity, and judgment were "inborn." Their "unimpeded growth" (given concerned cultivation) would produce mature tendencies to moral action. It is not clear how Mencius responds to the puzzle. He seems sometimes to assume that an action is right because a (mature) sage's heart-mind would choose it. Other times his implicit criterion looks to be idealist utilitarianism.

Later thinkers (including Daoists) attacked that reliance on the authority of *tian*. Mohists observed (along with Shen Dao) that anyone could claim that authority for anything they did. The text credited to Laozi suggested that natural (pre-learned) action would surely be a less elaborate morality than Mencius needed (though Laozi, too, favored "unlearning"). Zhuangzi argued that all actual characterizations of "right and wrong" are products of training and a learned perspective and, hence, all natural.

This recurrent anthropological analysis of commitment to spirits and ritual as functional practices that solidify human community and encourage social conformity is recurrent in Confucius, Mozi, and the Daoists. This naturalistic analysis informs the third version of Confucian ethics. Xunzi (ca. 300–230 BCE), who returned to relying on conventional authority, but now with an implicit acceptance of the answer: "It is right because convention says it is right." Xunzi's apparent justification is philosophical despair. The discussion had settled that nature is not an authority because it gives no clear direction. The only alternative must be historical convention. The conventions make peaceful human social life possible. Xunzi's conventionalism was influential as political authority swamped the classical period of philosophy under official "cosmic" superstition.

Religious attitudes flourished after the onset of the dark ages but often retained their formal naturalistic (non-metaphysical) character. Apart from the skeptical Wang Cong (CE 27–97), little further philosophical reflection on religious issues preceded the introduction of Buddhism. Wang's skepticism, typically, targeted the view that nature reflects human concerns and moral attitudes. Buddhism, with its own sets of issues, then dominated Chinese intellectual life for a millennium and the Confucianism that

emerged was a blend of Buddhist individualist aspiration and an intellectualized version of Mencius.

## Piety and Divine Simplicity

If Daoism stands as a paradigm of Chinese mysticism, then the question is how to characterize Daoist mysticism. How can we recognize “religiosity” or “spirituality” in a non-theological Daoism? I noted above that no alleged “experience” of inexpressible “oneness” informs the view. Still, we find the familiar language of incommensurability and the ecstatic expressions of some kind of achievement or insight.

The incommensurable subject (also found in the Zen focus on “practice”) is a pragmatic one. The “mystical” attitude is not a belief content, but a non-propositional life attitude accompanying virtuosity in performance. Paradigms of the attitude include the consummate artist, craftsman, lover, priest, sports competitor, etc., who “plays out of his mind.” The activity so absorbs us that we “lose” our “ego” and become one with the art or activity. We cannot, however, directly teach this as we can the skill itself. The injunction to “do it spontaneously” hardly helps a person to learn.

So absorbed, we cannot distinguish acting from being “led” by the “spaces” and shape of the situation in which we act. A musician may describe himself as “being played by the instrument.” A Daoist “mystic” lives her life with that immediacy, intensity, and focus.

In many modern interpretations, this characterization of the appropriate life attitude applies as well to Confucianism. They identify it as total involvement in ceremony, chanting, and ritual dance. Confucians celebrate the attitudinal rewards of total absorption in ceremony alongside Confucius’ pragmatic agnosticism and the intellectualized Confucian refusal to accept the popular “theology” behind their ancient rituals. Conventions and ceremony are means of social cohesion and the healthy expression of human feelings. Practice and participation stand as an independently rewarding and wholly absorbing aesthetic value.

The Buddhist period in China is largely responsible for the theological reading of Daoism, which became common in the Neo-Confucian revival. It viewed Buddhism and Daoism as near theological twins with an all-encompassing (pantheistic) divine “stuff.” The Buddhists called it Buddha-nature and the Daoists called it *dao*. Such a reading of Daoism does provide some near parallels to Western puzzles and paradoxes of divine attributes such as perfect simplicity (see Chapter 31, Simplicity). There were, however, only Neo-Confucian theologians expounding this allegedly Daoist theology as an interpretation of ancient texts – Daoist philosophy had mostly disappeared from China.

Classical thinkers, however, may have confronted these puzzles in a purely metaphysical guise. An obscure dialogue seems to challenge the coherence of any reference to “everything.” Zhuangzi most obviously picks up the theme when he shows that any claim that “all is one” must be wrong. Whenever we try to speak of the “everything” taken as a unity, there is the one and the saying, which, he notes, makes two! He thus denied what Neo-Confucian interpretations took to be the central tenet of Daoism!



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## African Religions from a Philosophical Point of View

KWASI WIREDU

If there is wisdom in starting with first things first, then a philosophical discussion of African religions should start with an inquiry into the applicability of the concept of religion to African life and thought. Not only is the word “religion” not an African word – this in itself is not necessarily a problem – but also, as Mbiti suggests, it is doubtful whether there is a single-word or even periphrastic translation of the word in any African language. This does not mean, of course, that the phenomenon itself does not exist among Africans. One may have something without being given to talking about it. Mbiti himself, for example, maintains in his *African Religions and Philosophy* that Africans are pre-eminently religious, not even knowing how to live without religion (Mbiti 1990, p. 2). Be that as it may, there is at this stage an assumption that we need to disavow, at least methodologically. We must not assume that having a religion is necessarily either a moral or an intellectual credit. Some of the early European visitors to Africa, going, it would seem, principally on a cheeky ignorance, freely opined that the African mind was in too rude a condition to be capable of a religious feeling or perception. By contrast, many African scholars have been keen to prove that Africans, by their own unsupplemented lights, were able to develop a belief in God and related matters before ever a European set foot in Africa. In either case there is the presupposition that having a religion is a kind of achievement. This assumption, unfortunately, is likely to handicap a dispassionate examination of the sense, if any, in which religion may be said to have a place in African culture.

Obviously, we need in this connection to be clear about what religion itself is. In this enterprise we need not be unduly intimidated by the well-known multiplicity of definitions of religion; for, when the willfully idiosyncratic ones are discounted, what this situation really presents is a legion of sufficient conditions. And if that is an embarrassment, it is only an embarrassment of riches. Moreover, there is a necessary distinction, not often enough drawn, which can gain us considerable simplification. It is the distinction between religion and *a* religion. Religion as such is, in essence, simply a metaphysic joined to a particular type of attitude. A religion, on the other hand, is, typically, all this plus an ethic, a system of ritual, and an officialdom (usually hierarchical) for exhorting, reinforcing or monitoring conformity to them. In the first sense, religion can be purely personal – one can be religious without having a religion; which, actually, is not at all uncommon. In the second, religion is both personal and institutional. One of

the theses of the present discussion is going to be that, contrary to frequent suggestions, religion in Africa is predominantly of a personal rather than an institutional character. The claim, in other words, is that the concept of religion applies to African culture in most instances only in a minimal sense.

In this minimal sense to be religious is to entertain certain ontological and/or cosmological beliefs about the nature of the world and about human destiny and to have an attitude of trust, dependency, or unconditional reverence toward that which is taken to be the determiner of that destiny, whether it be an intelligent being or an aspect of reality. In terms of this characterization, it is not necessary for religion to include belief in a deity. In Africa, however, as in a great many areas of the world, that belief is the centerpiece of religion. But in Africa, unlike elsewhere, it also frequently more or less exhausts its scope. African worldviews usually, though not invariably, feature a Supreme Being who is regarded as responsible for the world order. Generally, that being is explicitly conceived to be omniscient, omnibenevolent, and, subject to a rider to be entered in due course, omnipotent (see Chapter 28, Omniscience; Chapter 30, Goodness; and Chapter 27, Omnipotence). A sense of dependency, trust, and unconditional reverence is almost everywhere evident in African attitudes to the Supreme Being.

Strikingly, however, rituals of God-worship are often absent from African life. Mbiti (1970, p. 178) has observed that the word "worship" has no counterpart in many African languages. While this does not necessarily imply that the practice did not exist, it would explain it, if that were the case. In the particular case of the Akans, Abraham (1962, p. 52) has pointed out (correctly) not only that they "never had a word for worship" but also that "worship is a concept that had no place in Akan thought." Even when there is a simulacrum of worship among an African people, there is nothing comparable to the regular, rigorously organized, and officer-led group-praying and divine praise-singing characteristic of Christianity, for example. Nor is there an analogy to the weekly moral and metaphysical discourses from Christian pulpits. Many African peoples are, indeed, known to pray, and some to make offerings and sacrifices, to God. But these activities are often personal and informal or, when formal, as in some of the sacrifices, rather episodic. Some African groups, such as the Ankore and the Banyarwandas, are positive that an omnibenevolent being does not need or expect such things as sacrifices (see Mbiti 1970, p. 180, and on worship generally chs. 16–20). Indeed, it is difficult to see what use a perfect being could have for worship or how he could welcome it at all. But what, from a philosophical point of view, is of the utmost importance in all this is that Africans tend not to base their conceptions of the meaning of morality on their belief in God. And this must account largely for the non-institutional character of their religion. Given, however, the prevalence of the contrary impression in the literature, these claims require a lot of explaining.

Consider, then, the general idea of the dependency of morality on religion. If this relation is interpreted in a causal or genetic sense, there is an iota, though only an iota, of truth in it. Some people in Africa (and presumably outside Africa) are discouraged from mischief by the fear of divine retribution. But freedom from this kind of reason for action or inaction is, in fact, one of the marks of moral maturity recognized among the wise folks of well-known traditional African societies. Even if this were not the case, it still would not follow that *evil* is understood to mean *that which will bring divine retribution*; for, in that case, to warn that evil will bring those consequences would

amount to announcing that what will bring divine retribution will bring divine retribution – a splendid truth, regrettably lacking in moral information. The suggestion is not necessarily that traditional sages are known to have formulated this particular consideration, though the philosophic ones among them are capable of even more incisive argumentation; it is rather that the communalist ethic typical of many traditional African societies is just such as to inhibit trafficking in such tautologies. From the communalist standpoint, morality is the harmonization of the interests of the individual to the interests of the community on the principle of empathetic impartiality. On this view, morality derives, rationally, from the desiderata of social existence, not from any transcendent source. In the African example this is easily inferred from the corpus of moral maxims commonplace among the people (see, for example, Gyekye 1987, chs. 8–10). Given some such conception of morality and an unqualified belief in the justice of God, there is no reason why a flagging virtue may not be bolstered up by thoughts of divine sanctions even if good and evil are conceived in a manner logically independent of the will of God (see Chapter 68, *Divine Command Ethics*). Again, although it is true to say that most Africans believe that it is God who, as Idowu (1962, p. 145) puts it, implanted in human beings the sense of right and wrong, it does not follow that we should expect them to hold for this reason that “right,” for example, means “approved by God”; just as it would not occur to anyone to suppose that if people believe that the sense of beauty and ugliness was implanted in us by God, then they take “beautiful” to mean something like “appreciated by God.”

One reason why morality has so often been thought to be closely connected with religion in Africa is that the scope of African religion has been routinely enlarged to include the beliefs and procedures relating to the great assortment of extra-human beings that is a component of various African worldviews. There is, indeed, no doubt that these worldviews usually postulate a hierarchy of beings. At the top is God, and, in the middle, various kinds of “spirits,” some supposed to be resident in certain remarkable trees, mountains, and rivers, together with the departed ancestors. Below these are the human species, the lower animals, vegetation, and the realm of inanimate objects, in descending order. The “spirits” are credited with the ability to help or harm human beings in ways that surpass the causes and effects familiar in everyday life. For this reason people are careful to try to establish good relations with the more susceptible ones, and this often involves “rituals” replete with supplications sweetened with flattery. Among these extra-human beings the ancestors occupy a special position. They are not the most powerful, but they are, in the great majority of African societies, the most loved and respected. The world of the ancestors is conceived to be continuous and analogous to that of the living, and the interactions between the two realms are, by common reckoning, regular and on a day-to-day basis. In this setup the ancestors may be called the extra-mundane guardians of morality; their entire concern is to watch over the affairs of the living members of their families, rewarding right conduct and punishing its opposite, with unquestioned justice, while, at all times, working for their well-being. It is on this ground that the ancestors are so highly venerated. Notice that, on this showing, the orientation of the afterlife in the African “eschatology” is thoroughly this-worldly (see Wiredu 1992, ch. 7). Not surprisingly, many African customs and institutions have some connection with the belief in the ancestors in particular and the world of spirits at large.

What, however, is the justification for calling the attitude toward the ancestors and the other “spirits” religious? It is apparent that this is based on certain ways of ontologically compartmentalizing the worldview just adumbrated. The orders of existence above the human sphere are categorized as supernatural, spiritual, and, in some connections, transcendent, while the rest is designated as natural, material, and temporal. If to this is added the characterization of the activities dedicated to establishing useful relations with the extra-human powers and forces as worship, then the stage is set for attributing to Africans not only an intense religious sense but also a particularly pervasive institutional religion with unmistakable imprints on all major aspects of life (see Mbiti 1990, introduction and *passim*). In this perception of African religion it is not even necessary to bring God into the picture. It seems sufficient, under some available definition of religion, that Africans be seen to believe in, and worship, a great many “supernatural” and “spiritual” entities who are credited with power over the life and fate of human beings and in some cases invested with a moral authority. This, actually, is how Christian missionaries saw African religion, which they called paganism. Missionary semantics in Ghana offer an almost picturesque illustration of this fact. In vernacular communication in the Akan area of Ghana the missionaries called the indigenous religion *Abosomsom*, which means “stone-service” (*abo* means “stones” and *som* means “service,” which, in the evangelical translation, is a forced approximation to the concept of worship). Their own religion they called *Nyamesom*, meaning the service of God (*Nyame* means “God” and *som*, as we have seen, means “service”). Interestingly, what many Akan Christians, sincere in the faith and, at the same time, proud of the indigenous religion – conceptual incompatibilities notwithstanding – have done about this linguistic anomaly is merely to insist that the indigenous religion includes, in addition to the business about the “spirits,” recognition of the existence of the Almighty God.

The incompatibilities, however, cut too deep to be so cheerfully skated over. Not only are there radical disparities between the Christian worldview and its African counterparts with respect to specific ontological issues, but also the categories of thought underpinning the concept of religion which has just been used have a questionable coherence in the relevant African contexts. A most fundamental pair of such categories is the natural/supernatural distinction. In describing the “spirits” in question as supernatural, it is assumed that this distinction is intelligible within the conceptual framework of the African peoples concerned. Yet one who consults any average text on African religion will be readily furnished with stories of spirits not only living in material circumstances but also indulging in physical ventures, gyrating upon the head not excluded. Moreover, spirits are not spoken of in any other terms. The conceptual implications of this have rarely been seriously explored *from the point of view of the African worldviews themselves*. Occasionally, though, a foreign researcher into African thought has come close to the beginnings of wisdom in this matter. Thus, Kenneth Little (1954, p. 113), in a study of the Mende of Sierra Leone, notes that “the situation seems to be that they regard ‘supernatural’ phenomena in much the same kind of way and frame of mind as they regard the material circumstances of their environment and the motives and actions of human beings. ... Such an attitude is [also], within the bounds of Mende knowledge, quite empirical.” The quotes around the word “supernatural” do not betray any uneasiness regarding the intelligibility of the metaphysical dichotomy of the



natural and the supernatural in the abstract; they are merely indicative of Little's suspicion that the Mende do not employ it in their thinking. His explanation is that "they have an essentially 'practical' attitude to life" which manifests itself as a "lack of interest in metaphysics." It is arguable, however, that they don't use that dichotomy because it is fundamentally incompatible with their metaphysic. At all events, in the conceptual framework of the African group to which the present writer belongs, namely, that of the Akans of Ghana, which, on the evidence of various studies (e.g., Sawyer 1970), is very similar to that of the Mende in many important respects, it makes scant sense to divide the world order into two, calling one nature and the other supernature.

Within the system of thought just alluded to, the world (*wiase*) is a unified order of created things (*abode*). (*Bo* means "to make" and (*a*)*de* means "thing(s)," but see the comment about creation below.) The so-called spirits are as creaturely as the humblest animal. The world order operates in every detail according to laws, some commonplace, others more recondite; but the latter do not contradict or abrogate the former, and interactions between the realms predominantly governed by these kinds of laws are perfectly regular in a cosmological sense. Accordingly, explanations of some puzzling phenomena in common experience in terms of the activities of "spirits," for example, do not generate the sense of "going out of this world" which the ascent, in another worldview, from the natural to the supernatural would seem to suggest. Certainly, "spirits" are regarded as being out of the ordinary, but they are not felt to be out of this world. Moreover – so the belief goes – they can actually be seen and communicated with by those who have medicinally reinforced eyes and appropriate resources of communication. And there is no lack of such "specialists" in many African societies. Significantly, when descriptions are given of what is thus seen, they are positively material in imagery. It is apparent, on these considerations, that calling the "spirits" supernatural represents a substantial misunderstanding. The same considerations must give pause to those who would speak of the "spirits" as spiritual. But there is a much more fundamental objection. The word "spiritual" has a neo-Cartesian sense; it connotes non-spatiality. But – to turn to the African language that I know from the inside – in the Akan language the concept of existence, as Gyekye (1987, pp. 179–81) rightly insists, is intrinsically spatial: to exist (*wo ho*) is to be somewhere. Consequently, in the Akan understanding, if "spirits" exist, they must be spatial and cannot be spiritual in a neo-Cartesian sense (see Chapter 34, Incorporeality). They are not, on that account, fully material; for to be such it is necessary to be not just spatial but also subject to the causal laws of common experience. By all indications, however, the extra-human beings in question are supposed to be exempt, for example, from some of the dynamical laws that constrain the motion and efficiency of ordinary objects. Thus they are thought to be capable of affecting human beings without, *normally*, being seen, and the action can be at a great distance. Such entities may, for convenience, be called quasi-material or quasi-physical. It is because they are quasi-material rather than spiritual that I have so far used the word "spirits" with quotational reservations. The aim has been to forestall the common fallacy of supposing that spirits must be necessarily spiritual. In fact, it is not only with respect to Akan discourse that this is not the case; Western spiritualist literature also is full of stories of quasi-material apparitions. The difference is that Western metaphysics additionally harbors schools of thought dedicated to the propagation of notions of spiritual entities in the Cartesian sense, and

Akan traditional thought is devoid of such an inclination for the deep semantical reason already adduced. It is probably unnecessary at this stage to belabor the point that in being quasi-material, the spirits of the Akan worldview are quasi-empirical and therefore not transcendent in any useful sense. The decidedly empirical bent of discourse about spirits among various African peoples suggests that the Akan language is not unique in the present respect.

Revisiting now the question of the worship of the ancestors and certain other spirits, it emerges that if the attitude involved is that of worship, then it is not the worship of anything that may appropriately be called supernatural or spiritual or transcendent. But is it really worship, religious worship, that is? The following considerations do not encourage an affirmative answer. Leaving the ancestors out of account for a moment, it is a commonplace of African studies that the African attitude to the spirits, often hyperbolically called "lesser gods," is purely utilitarian. Ritualized praise is rendered unto them only because of expected benefits. As Busia (1954, p. 205) remarks: "the gods are treated with respect if they deliver the goods, and with contempt if they fail." Or worse: if devotees develop a confirmed impression of futility, attention is withdrawn, and the "god" concerned is left in fatal solitude. The reference to fatality is intended with all seriousness. In 1975 the African Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka startled an audience of African scholars at the University of Ghana when, in remarks enthusiastic of the Yoruba "gods," he pointed out quite serenely that the Yorubas create their own "gods" (such as the god of electricity) and can on occasion kill them. Yet the idea that an inefficient "god" can be denuded of all vital power through an enforced shortage of attention or other, more technical, means is widely received among traditional folks.

Allied to the last reflection is the consideration that the "gods," not unlike the Greek varieties of old, are not of a uniform moral standing: some are good, some bad, others nondescript; from which it is apparent that the devotee reserves the right of periodic review of their moral credentials. It follows, in turn, that the wishes of the "gods" – of even the moral elite among them – do not define moral goodness, notwithstanding the fact that the reactions of some of them may have a policing influence on conduct. The same is true of the ancestors, although, except in a few cases in Africa, such as among the Nuer and the Dinka (see, for example, Lienhardt 1961, p. 129), they are held in higher and warmer esteem and are more irreversibly credited with immortality. The ancestors are frequently so important in African life that something called ancestor worship is sometimes elevated into the veritable essence of African religion. But, in truth, the veneration of the ancestors is only an accentuated form of the respect given to the living elders of the group, and their moral authority is exerted only in the enforcement of morals established on pre-mortem criteria. These criteria of good conduct, as noted earlier, are founded on the quest for the impartial harmonization of human interests. It might be said, on this ground, by the way, that the ethic in question is a rational, humanistic one (see Gyekye 1987, ch. 8; Wiredu 1983). It should be noted, furthermore, that in most traditional African societies the average individual hopes eventually to gain a place in the community of the honored ancestors. If the ancestors were standardly worshipped and thought of as a species of gods, this would mean that a hankering after self-apotheosis is routine in those societies, suggesting a generalized megalomania quite frightening to contemplate. As it happens, the truth is less frightening. "Worship" is an elastic word, but it is stretching it rather far to call the attitude to



the ancestors worship in any strict religious sense. And if this is so with respect to the ancestors, it is even more evident with respect to the assortment of spirits mentioned above.

If we now compare African attitudes to God with their attitudes to the spirits as just characterized, the contrast is tremendous. True, the will of God also does not define goodness, but, on the other hand, goodness (along with other qualities) does define God. And this is unique to God. Not even the ancestors are considered good by definition. In consequence, the reverence accorded to God is, as previously noted, unconditional, which is what the object of a genuinely religious attitude must evoke. The ancestors and "lesser gods" certainly fail to elicit this kind of respect. If, in spite of all this, one insists – as many do – on including the belief in the existence and activities of the spirits in the scope of African religions, this can only be by dint of a considerable extension of the concept of religion. Aside from the gratuitous assumption that, of religion, the more the better, it is not clear what the point of it is. But it is clear what some of its negative consequences are.

One such consequence is that skepticism regarding the spirits and their capabilities, on the part of contemporary Africans, tends to be perceived by them (and others as well) as disenchantment with the traditional religion. Adherence to a foreign religion, say Islam (see Chapter 7) or Christianity (see Chapter 6), is then seen as a desirable substitution. If it had been realized that the beliefs and practices revolving round the spirits do not really constitute a part of the religion, conversion might still conceivably have taken place, but it might perhaps have been for weightier reasons. A reverse side of this phenomenon is that other Africans, wishing to demonstrate their indigenous authenticity in the matter of religion, are apt to engage in proud exhibitions of spirit-oriented rituals with calls on their compatriots to join in the preservation of our religious heritage. But the beliefs involved will probably not survive the advance of modern knowledge. One cannot, of course, be dogmatic in this, for in the West progress in scientific knowledge has not, by any stretch of the imagination, wiped out the belief in all kinds of spirits and related practices. Still, a properly discriminating understanding of the nature of African religions is likely to promote more pertinent programs for their preservation, if preserved they must be.

Philosophically speaking, whether a religion is worthy of preservation should depend on the soundness of its metaphysic. In Africa, however, a judicious metaphysical evaluation is impeded by conceptual distortions resulting from the fact that the reigning traditions of scholarship in African religions, for reasons connected with colonialism, were established by foreign scholars who, naturally enough, articulated their accounts in terms of the intellectual categories of their own culture. Among the most basic of these are the dualisms of the natural and the supernatural, the material and the spiritual and the transcendent and the empirical. I have argued that these categorial distinctions are not coherent within typical African conceptual frameworks. Whether this incoherence is due to a defect in those schemes of thought or in the dualisms themselves is a cross-cultural issue, which, *pace* relativism, can be fruitfully investigated. In the present connection, however, it only needs to be noted that, on account, partly, of this contextual incoherence, the concept of religion itself applies to African thinking (in at least many cases) only in the most minimal sense.

It should be clear from the above discussion that we can speak of religion in African life only because of the widespread belief and trust in a Supreme Being who is the author of the world order. Incidentally, although the belief is widespread in Africa, it is not universal. If p'Bitek (1970, chs. 8 and 9) is right, the central Luo, for instance, do not even operate with the concept of a Supreme Being. Besides, individual traditional skeptics are not unknown even in the God-believing societies. In any case, because of the non-transcendental cast of much African thought, even when the belief is entertained its meaning is usually more radically different from Christian conceptions, for instance, than it has been orthodox to suppose. Thus the Supreme Being is conceived to be the author of the world in the sense of a cosmic designer or architect rather than a creator *ex nihilo* (from nothing; see Chapter 37, Creation and Conservation), and his omnipotence is understood to mean that he can accomplish any *well-defined* project, not that he can do absolutely everything, including, for example, making *ad hoc* changes in the reign of cosmic law. Taken together with the logical independence of morality from the belief in the Supreme Being, the frequent absence of the worship of God and the this-worldliness of the afterlife, a distinctive picture of African religions emerges that will have to be deeply pondered in any study of the religions of the world.

So far attention has been on what African religions are or are not. But one might ask what issues of philosophical interest arise within them. Interestingly, it turns out that quite a few philosophical concerns are common to African and Western philosophies of religion. For example, consider the question of whether the existence of a Supreme Being can be proved. In both traditions of thought this is a question that has attracted the attention of both technical and intuitive philosophers. In both, some say yes, some no. Among the proponents, perhaps the most popular argument is what is known in Western philosophy as the argument from design. The thought is that design is evident in the world. Since a design implies a designer, it follows that there exists a being who designed the world (see Chapter 44, Teleological and Design Arguments). If this argument is sound, it proves a designer not a *creator ex-nihilo*. For an Akan, such a logico-semantic reminder may not be necessary since, for her, the Supreme Being is a demiurgic designer. In fact, one of the *descriptive* names of God is *Ananse Kokroko*, which translates as the Stupendous Spider (who, metaphorically, weaves the cosmological web that is the world).

Nor does the idea of an *ex nihilo* creator create any temptation for the Akan mind, because in Akan discourse to exist is to be somewhere, and therefore this creator will have to have been nowhere while creating everywhere (Wiredu 1996, p. 121). Another comparison of issues concerns the freedom of the will. The thesis of determinism, namely, that all events, including human actions, are caused, is commonplace in Akan thought. A frequent saying is that if nothing had touched the dry branches of a palm tree, they would not have rattled. (*Se bribi annko ka papa a, anke erenye kredede.*) Or, more literally, everything has what brought it about. (*Biribiara wo ne kofarebae.* *Biribiara* means "everything," *wo ne* means "has its" and *kofarebae* is a composite word meaning "what went and brought it.") Interestingly, there is not the slightest evidence in Akan discourse that this determinism is felt to threaten free will in any way. This is a remarkable contrast to Western philosophy, where many good philosophers have the strong feeling that such a threat is real.

Why is determinism not felt to raise a problem about free will in Akan? The reason is that in ordinary Akan discourse, *free will*, to which there is no easy equivalence in Akan, may be resolved into the ability to think rationally and act responsibly. If a chain of causes and effects, such as addiction to drugs, were to lead to an individual becoming seriously erratic in thought and behavior, then it would be said that the causality involved has been destructive to his free will. On the other hand, suppose that, through excellent upbringing, an individual has grown to become a right-thinking member of society, fully conscious of his responsibilities. Then it would be said that what we have here is a series of causes and effects beneficial to the freedom of the will. The decisive consideration, then, is not the being subjected to causality but rather what kind of causality has been at play (Wiredu 1986, ch. 9, sect. 5).

The special interest of these remarks about causation and free will for our discussion of religion is that one might suppose that predestination too, which might be thought to involve divine predetermination, would cause no apprehensions about human free will. That is not the case. The Akans generally believe that before a person is born into this world, his life principle (*okra*) in the form of a replica of himself comes into God's presence to receive his or her destiny. Once the investiture of destiny is completed, one comes to the world to live it out with no possibility of a change. The problem now is that, according to the perceptions of the culture, some people have a good destiny, others a gloomy variety. Success routinely comes to the one, consistent failure to the other. By received terminology, the former are *lucky* people, the latter *unlucky*. As one might expect, many of the unlucky ones are known to blame their failures not on their choices, but on their fate, that is, the destiny assigned to them by God. Here not only free will comes into question but also the justice of the divine dispensation that made some lucky and others unlucky. However, rather than blame the Supreme Being himself, some people are content to bite the apparent contradiction and seek the aid of "specialists" to change their destiny for the better. This, of course, is not the only option, but it is the one most susceptible to a brief formulation.

Almost all the problems noted here and others that can be readily recalled (see Wiredu 2002, pp. 20–34) have their counterparts in philosophy in the Western world. When African philosophy ceases to be a curiosity in those parts, the philosophy of religion will be one of the most fruitful areas of intercultural conversation.

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## Judaism

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In the heyday of positivism philosophy was often a kind of metadiscourse. There were philosophy of science, philosophy of law, philosophy of language, and, of course, philosophy of religion. These metadisciplines sought to clarify the various modes of discourse and untangle the conceptual confusions that might arise within them. Sometimes the function was propaedeutic, sometimes apologetic, but the bracketing of the object language was decisive: philosophers of science were not doing science when they put on their philosophical hats, but clarifying conceptual foundations, justifying, sometimes almost acting as cheerleaders. Philosophy of law or ethics did not indulge in normative discourse but explained it, or exposed its pretensions. Philosophy of religion was not about the sacred but about the modes of speech and judgment that religious persons might use (see Chapter 41, Religious Language). Users of the “object language” were thought of as somewhat unselfconscious naifs or naturals. Philosophy might awaken them to the inner problems of the language they were using, and then, it was assumed, they would no longer speak or act in the same way. Philosophy would make them cautious or skeptical or tolerant. Perhaps it would teach them the deep inner truth of relativism, symbolism, or positivism itself. Certainly their thinking would never be the same. Philosophy of Judaism was about the problems of being Jewish – just as philosophy of religion was about the problems of being religious, or metaethics was about the problems of speaking or thinking ethically.

Today, happily, the tide has come in, or the catwalk has collapsed, and philosophers now find themselves swimming in the same water as those other human beings whose thoughts they seek to understand. We have religious and ethical philosophy, rather than just philosophy *of* ...; normative ethics has started up again, with gusto, and religious philosophy can speak of God, or ritual, or the nexus between divinity and obligation, and not just about the problems of religious discourse. The quest for a peculiar mode of religious speech or thought has all but ended, except in some rather projectively romantic forms of armchair anthropology. We can speak of Jewish philosophy rather than just philosophy of Judaism. The change is liberating, not least because it returns this ancient discipline to its roots and broadens its scope to match its widest historical range. Jewish philosophy will embrace a universe of problems that have

exercised thoughtful exponents of the Jewish tradition – problems of cosmology and theology, social history, hermeneutics, philosophical anthropology, jurisprudence, and indeed aesthetics.

If philosophy is an open inquiry that seeks critical scrutiny of its own assumptions, Jewish philosophy will involve the informing of that inquiry by the resources of the Jewish tradition. Jewish philosophy so defined subsumes the narrower question, “what does it mean to be a Jew?” in the larger universe of Jewish concerns – from the problem of evil to divine transcendence, immortality, human freedom, justice, history and destiny, nature and economy, the value and meaning of life in general, and the value and meaning of human life in particular.

What unites practitioners of Jewish philosophy is not some exotic logic that we can label chauvinistically or patronizingly as “Talmudic,” nor a common store of doctrines, but a chain of discourse and problematics, an ongoing conversation that is jarred but not halted by episodes of persecution and exile and by attendant shifts of language, external culture, or epistemic background. What makes this conversation distinctive is no unique flavor or accent, no values or concerns unshared by others, but a respect for prior Jewish efforts found worthy as points of reference or points of departure as the conversation continues.

The unity and distinctiveness of Jewish philosophy, then, are both conceptual and historical. There is a historical continuity from one participant to the next – as there is in general philosophy. And there is a critical reappropriation and redefinition of the elements of the tradition in each generation – as there must be in any religious or cultural transmission.

The first major Jewish philosopher was Philo (ca. 20 BCE–ca. CE 50), a cultured Alexandrian whose commitments to his people were evident in his embassy to Caligula on their behalf, but also in his creative synthesis of Platonic, Stoic, and biblical ideas (see Chapter 8, *Ancient Philosophical Theology*). Adapting the Stoic technique of allegory, Philo presented the Torah as a paradigm of the rational legislation Plato had called for, a law that grounds its commands in reasons, not sheer sanctions or impenetrable mysteries. Underlying the Law’s authority was God’s role as the creator, not as arbitrary lord but as source of the wisdom manifest in nature and echoed in the Mosaic norms pursuing human harmony, creativity, and charity. It was by wisdom that God made his love manifest. For the plan of nature, the Logos (a concept appropriated by Jewish, Christian, and Muslim thinkers) was at once nature’s immanent archetype and God’s transcendent attribute. In nature and in the Law we grasp, as it were, God’s idea.

Philo called philosophy the handmaiden (*ancilla*) of theology. Indeed, he was the first to use that trope. But note, despite the seeming subordination, that it was to philosophy, not astrology or textual stratigraphy, that Philo entrusted theology. Through his eyes we see the Torah as a philosophical text – Genesis, not just as a creation myth but as a self-conscious effort to fathom the natural world, by reference to the act of an utterly transcendent – yet not inscrutable – God (see Chapter 37, *Creation and Conservation*). Just as modern Bible scholars view the poetic chastity of Genesis against the backdrop of the theomachies and theogonies of ancient Near Eastern myths, Philo assays Mosaic naturalism and rationalism against the background of the Hellenistic mystery cults. He finds in Moses the philosophical lawgiver for whom Plato had hoped.



But reliance on a monarch's discretion is gone, displaced by a calm confidence in the norms of the Law. Philosophy guides the reading of those norms. For human wisdom reflects the divine wisdom that framed the Law.

The first systematic Jewish philosopher was Saadiah Gaon (882–942), a pioneer exegete, grammarian, liturgist, and lexicographer. Born in the Fayyum region of Egypt, Saadiah studied in Tiberias and led the ancient Talmudic academy of Pumpedita, by then relocated to Baghdad. His *Book of Critically Selected Beliefs and Convictions* surveys the varied views on major issues and defends those judged best-founded in reason and scripture – creation, providence, and accountability, but also moral and epistemic objectivism (see Chapter 39, Providence). In a distinctive epistemological opening to his work, Saadiah rebuts skepticism and relativism, arguing that the skeptic, in effect, denies reality, while the relativist would have thought determine facts rather than be guided by them. Against moral and aesthetic monism, Saadiah favors a humanizing and humanistic pluralism as the basis of the best life for human beings and the best standards of beauty. He dismisses Neoplatonic monistic yearnings with the observation that God is one but the human world, manifold. And he discounts mystical and ascetic hankerings after simplicity and austerity, arguing that confinement of one's values to just one goal stifles our wholesome impulses and defeats our human purpose. If our one goal, in fact, is ascetic self-denial, Saadiah argues, the outcome is not just self-stultification, but a bitter misanthropy that proves a mockery of the pious impulses that inspired it.

Saadiah is sometimes described as a practitioner of *kalam*: an apologetic, dialectical theology rooted in appeals to scriptural authority. But Saadiah's biblical hermeneutics are as informed by (a Platonizing) philosophy as his philosophical views are by scripture. Convinced of the Torah's veracity, he insists that biblical expressions be taken as their language was familiarly understood among their original recipients – but only if logic and science, sound tradition, and other texts permit. Otherwise we must read figuratively, forestalling capricious readings by citing textual parallels to warrant each departure from familiar Hebrew usage.

The Hebrew poet Ibn Gabirol (ca. 1021–1058), as discovered only in 1845, was one and the same with the philosopher Avicembrol, author of the *Fons Vitae* ("The Fountain of Life"), which survives intact only in Latin, although passages quoted in Hebrew point the way to the lost Arabic original. Written as a dialogue of teacher with disciple, it addresses the ontology of the One and the many, relying on "intellectual matter," and a primal Will to mediate divine simplicity (see Chapter 31, Simplicity). Among the work's most endearing exchanges: "*Disciple*: 'The resolution of all things to these two [universal matter and form], is this fact or opinion?' *Master*: 'It is not a fact but an opinion.'"

The *Fons Vitae* is commonly said to bear no hint of its Jewish authorship, since it uses no biblical prooftexts or catch phrases. But that claim discounts the celebrated title, drawn from the Psalms: "For with Thee is the Fountain of Life; by Thy light do we see light" (Psalms 36:9–36:10 in Christian Bibles). That line, viewing God as the source of life and light, builds a lofty, slender bridge between Hebraic spirituality and Neoplatonic metaphysics: life and light are expressions of God's creative act. The verse situates the exuberance of life and the inspiration of wisdom at the center of the poet-philosopher's vision, as they are for the psalmist.

Ibn Gabirol's *On the Improvement of the Moral Qualities* examines moral psychology in a physiological vein. While upholding the soul's immortality and the mind's affinity with the divine intellect, Ibn Gabirol links human emotions with the bodily senses – hauteur, humility, shame, and shamelessness with seeing; love, hate, pity, and hard-heartedness with hearing; ire, complaisance, jealousy, and spunk with smelling; joy, anxiety, serenity, and regret with tasting; free-spending, tightfistedness, boldness, and timidity with touching. The virtues, of course, are means between extremes. But, since each disposition represents a specific “temperament,” or blending of the bodily humors, Ibn Gabirol can discuss and “treat” the dispositions by reference not only to social norms but also to our embodiment, laying a physical groundwork for Maimonides' Aristotelian treatment of virtues and vices as habits which our choices overlay upon our inborn propensities.

Judah Halevi (before 1075–1141), perhaps the greatest post-biblical Hebrew poet, was another medically minded thinker who took moral and metaphysical guidance from nature. His philosophical dialogue the *Kuzari* imagines the encounter with Judaism of the king of the Khazars, a people of the far-off Volga, who had adopted Judaism in the eighth century. As Halevi sets the scene, the king has dreamed that his intentions please God, but not his actions. He summons a spokesman of the “despised religion” only after hearing from a Neoplatonist, a Christian, and a Muslim. The philosopher's ideas are attractive. But, as the king explains, it is his way of life, not his mind, that needs improvement. Besides, the sectarians who share the philosopher's ideas all seem sincerely bent on one another's murder. The problem is no mere abstraction. Halevi's poems reflect the mayhem he witnessed in Spain, the Bosnia, Guernica, or Darfur of his time, with Jews caught between the hammer and anvil of Reconquista and *jihad*. The text's dramatic irony as to the fictional philosopher's oblivion to such conflicts voices Halevi's condemnation of the poverty of the philosophical intellectualism of the day. His own response is to seek a way of life and thought firmly rooted in the practices and history of his people.

Placing culture (including material culture, language and poetics, imagination, and living tradition) where other philosophers had put logic, reason, and cosmology, Halevi wins plaudits among moderns of romantic bent as an adversary of philosophy. But he was in fact a skilled philosopher committed to a profound critique of established philosophical notions. His ontology, as deeply rooted in Ibn Gabirol as Marx is in Hegel, stems the tide of emanating celestial intellects that had so entranced the Neoplatonists. Having the spheres precipitate from disembodied intellects is “sheer supposition, without a shred of cogency,” he writes. How does simplicity become complex if the Neoplatonists are right that the simple gives rise only to what is simple? Why does emanation end just where it does? Why should awareness imply intellects into existence – let alone spheres? Why didn't Aristotle's self-knowledge give birth to a sphere?

Seizing on Ibn Gabirol's fusion of divine will and wisdom, Halevi, by a brilliant piece of alchemy, transmutes the Neoplatonists' spiritual matter into the divine word, now called *Amr*, the Arabic term for God's word of command. This new intermediary embodies the imperative force of God's archetypal and normative wisdom. With its help, Halevi, like Philo, and like the prophets in their way, finds God's word immanent and accessible, in nature and the Law.



Halevi's Khazar responds thoughtfully to the Christian and Muslim teachers: not having been reared among Christians, he does not long to make sense of Christian mysteries. Nor does he resonate to the poesy of the Qur'an. Naturalists always try to rationalize what they observe. But without direct experience or the heart's consent that is won in early childhood, Christian and Muslim traditions do not compel. The roots of commitment, Halevi finds, lie not in the momentary ecstasies of an isolated anchorite or the abstract ruminations of cognitivist philosophers, but in the transgenerational life of a people.

Touched by the yearnings of the Hebrew liturgy (to which he, like Ibn Gabirol, contributed), Halevi asks, poignantly, how one can weep for Zion and not hasten there, where God's presence is clearest and the life God commanded is most fully lived. Acting on his yearning, Halevi left Spain and journeyed to his people's ancient home, where he died – as legend has it, kissing the soil of Zion, run through by an Arab horseman's spear. But, even had he lived, his thirst would not have been slaked by arriving in the holy city. For his famous lines, "My heart is in the East, but I am in the utmost West," voice a spiritual as well as earthly exile, and a longing not sated by mere presence in the Land.

In the *Book of Guidance to the Duties of the Heart* Bahya Ibn Pakuda (mid-11th to mid-12th century) made philosophic understanding a spiritual obligation. Study of nature was the natural partner of the more traditional probing and pondering of God's Law and internalization of its commands. For God's message was inscribed in the cosmos and in the human mind and body as well as in the Torah.

Following the ancient pietist tradition, Bahya finds a kernel of self-serving in typical worries about free will, conundrums which neither reason nor the ancient texts can resolve. Wisdom urges us to take maximal responsibility for our own acts and accept all that befalls us as God's work (see Chapter 28, Omniscience). The temptation, Bahya notes, is to do just the opposite – blame fate, or God (as in the Epicurean dilemma) for what we do not control, even in ourselves, but indulge in self-congratulation, anxiety, self-pity, or remorse over what we deem our own domain. It's in the spiritual and moral realm that we should maximize our sense of responsibility, and in our material fortunes that we should use the pietist virtues of self-scrutiny and resignation, placing all in God's hands.

Bahya's strategy, like that of the Stoics, is rhetorical in good part, proposing a rhetoric aimed at self-encouragement and self-perfection. It offers a tactic for coping with good and ill fortune, not a metaphysical solution to the problems of free will and destiny. But in voicing an outlook that humanists will never wholly share, Bahya offers his readers a kind of reality check: our excuses and castigations are also rhetorical, as we notice when we catch ourselves assigning credit or blame, shouldering responsibility, or shirking it.

Maimonides, called the Rambam, an acronym of the Hebrew, Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (1138–1204), was born in Cordova but exiled with his family in 1148, when the Almohad invaders imposed conversion on non-Muslims. Living first in North Africa, then briefly in Palestine, he settled in Cairo and took up medicine to support his family after his merchant brother's death in a shipwreck. His medical service at the court of Saladin was complemented by a busy clinical practice, and he authored ten medical treatises.

Maimonides wrote three major juridical works. *The Book of the Commandments* schematized the traditional 613 *mitzvot* or divine commands of the Pentateuch, notably including “I am the Lord thy God ...” and “Thou shalt have no other gods before me ...” as the first positive and negative commandments, arguing, with rabbinic precedent (*Makkot*, near the end) that these two precepts, addressed directly by God to the human understanding, are axioms that ground all the rest. His Arabic commentary on the Mishnah, the ancient legal code that forms the backbone of the Talmud, interprets the “oral law” by which the rabbis elaborated biblical legislation. His aim is to spell out the rational principles underlying that law. Maimonides structures the commandments in terms of Aristotelian virtue ethics (see Chapter 67, *The Ethics of Religious Commitment*), arguing that they seek human moral and intellectual perfection by fostering the virtues that enable us to know God and realize our likeness to him.

Commenting on the promise to all Israel of “a portion in the world to come,” Maimonides lays out 13 credal articles that assure even non-philosophers a share in immortality, since beliefs are (as Plato’s teachings show) practical surrogates for the ideas that render the intellect immortal. His major and still authoritative fourteen-volume codification of Talmudic law, the *Mishneh Torah*, or “Law in Review,” written in Mishnaic Hebrew. Familiarly cited as the *Yad Hazakah*, or “Strong Hand,” since the word *yad*, hand, has the numerical value of 14, Maimonides’ Code takes as its motto the verse “Then shall I be unabashed to scrutinize all Thy commandments” (Psalm 119:6). It systematizes the vast corpus of Talmudic law, omitting rabbinic citations (although faithfully respecting rabbinic precedent) and cutting clear of the often digressive Talmudic discussions. The *Yad* organizes Halakha, normative Jewish practice, by classing biblical and rabbinic laws according to their purposes: A few brief commandments ground a moral code, the laws of torts and the penal code pursue peace and justice, those of the Sabbath or the elaborate temple ritual draw the mind to the idea of a transcendent God and wean it from all that is even reminiscent of pagan beliefs and practices. Strikingly, Maimonides elaborates a rabbinic political ideal, with the Torah as its constitution, a strong central ruler “to fight the battles of the Lord,” but who governs under the authority of the Law and the wisdom of its interpreters (see Chapter 70, *Religion, Law, and Politics*).

Maimonides’ crowning philosophical achievement was the *Guide of the Perplexed*, which examines theological problems under the rabbinic rubrics of “the account of creation” and “the account of the chariot” – the biblical narratives of Genesis and the vision of Ezekiel (see Chapter 11, *The Jewish Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology*). The rabbis permitted explication of these passages only one-on-one and only for the best-prepared students, who needed no more than hints to provoke their understanding. The problems, as Maimonides understood them, were those of cosmology and metaphysics, centered on the accommodation of the infinitely transcendent God to the finitude of creation. For Ezekiel seems to suggest, with much periphrasis, that he saw God in human form, and Genesis clearly proposes a causal relation between God’s timeless perfection (see Chapter 32, *Eternity*) and our changeable world.

To keep faith with the Talmudic injunction, lest unprepared readers face problems they cannot resolve, Maimonides couches his *Guide* as a letter to a single disciple with specific strengths and needs. He avoids calling the *Guide* a book. Tellingly, he does not state the problems it addresses, leaving its subject matter opaque to those who have

not grappled with these problems. So effective is this approach that even careful readers often imagine the *Guide* opens by refuting anthropomorphism, when in fact its first 70 chapters *assume* that all ordinary predicates and relations are inapplicable to God and address the question of how it is possible for humans to speak of God at all, a problematic voiced in the Midrashic remark: “How bold of the prophets to liken the creature to its Creator!” Maimonides deconstructs prophetic anthropomorphism, carefully avoiding the “onion peeling” that was the bugbear of his predecessor al-Ghazali (1058–1111), who feared that de-anthropomorphizing, carried too far, might leave one with nothing (see Chapter 10, *The Islamic Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology*). Maimonides shows how all biblical anthropomorphisms aim to communicate some (human) idea of perfection, while excluding the limitations that human terms and ideas typically entail. The God that emerges from this analysis is no ordinary being (Maimonides urges that even little children should be taught that God is not a person) but a being of sheer perfection whose absolute and necessary existence (see Chapter 33, *Necessity*) is made explicit when God reveals himself to Moses as “I am that I am,” an All-sufficiency encapsulated in the Tetragrammaton, whose letters are those of the verb to be.

Maimonides, like Saadiah, defends creation, but he warns against assuming that either creation or eternity can be proved. Aristotle, who taught us the difference between apodictic and dialectical arguments, reveals by his resort to persuasive language that he knew his own arguments for the eternity of the natural order were not rigorous proofs. They were in fact projections of an eternalism already implicit in the Aristotelian analysis of time and change, matter and potentiality. But *kalam* creationists proved too much. Their arguments dissolved the continuities of nature and atomized time. That made repeated, instantaneous acts of creation a necessity. It also made science impossible, freedom inconceivable, and the idea of creation itself incoherent.

In place of the certitude sought by the polemical exponents and adversaries of creation, Maimonides proposes only that creation is more probable conceptually and preferable theologically to eternalism. For, as Ibn Gabirol and others argued, eternalist emanation, without robust volition on God’s part, cannot explain how complexity emerged from divine simplicity. And the Aristotelian claim that nature has always been as it is does not leave room for God’s determination to have made a difference – as the voluntarism of Ibn Gabirol, Halevi, and al-Ghazali suggested that it should. Indeed, if Aristotelian essentialism and Neoplatonic emanationism are taken strictly, change would not seem possible at all.

Pondering the problems of evil, of providence, and of revelation – all questions that involve the limits in God’s creative manifestation – Maimonides finds precious hints in the book of Job (1:6), where Satan, the adversary, is said to have come “along with” the children of God (see Chapter 58, *The Logical Problem of Evil*; and Chapter 59, *The Evidential Problem of Evil*). Satan, according to one rabbinic gloss, is simply sin, or death. But the book of Job (which Maimonides reads as a fictional allegory of the problem of evil) tells us that Job was innocent. Satan, whom Maimonides identifies with metaphysical “otherness,” alienation from God’s absolute perfection, is matter; and Maimonides chides the Neoplatonists for not recognizing in their own idea of matter a solution to the problem of evil. For matter is a concomitant of creation, not a positive reality, a principle like the divine ideas, the forms and forces that give reality to natural

beings. Rather it “comes along with them,” in the sense that there would be no gift of existence without alienation, no creation without separation. Matter is the basis of evil, including human differences and vulnerabilities. It is not evil itself. At once the accomplished wife of Proverbs 31 and the married harlot of Proverbs 7, never content with just one form, matter in the human body is a receptivity that can be turned upward or downward. For the soul has the power to govern it.

We are thus neither as abandoned to circumstance as, say, Alexander of Aphrodisias suggests, nor as smothered by attentiveness as the occasionalist *kalam* might have it in expecting God to superintend the fall of every leaf. Providence comes to nature through the forms, perfection scaled to the capacities of finitude; but providence does reach individuals and is not confined to species (see Chapter 30, Goodness). For Aristotle himself taught us that universals exist only in their particulars. And the human form is not just a pattern of life but a substantial entity, a rational soul, whose guidance is the providence of the wise and whose fulfillment, in knowledge of God, is immortality. This ultimate goal of the philosopher is made accessible to others by prophets, those rare philosophers who are graced with the clarity of imagination to translate pure concepts into images and institutions, laws and symbols, beliefs and practices, that allow all humanity to taste the fruits of philosophy.

Space permits only brief mention of a few post-Maimonidean philosophers: Levi ben Gershom (Gersonides, 1288–1344), astronomer, mathematician, and exegete, sought in his *Wars of the Lord* to mediate between naturalism and theism, even compromising God’s omniscience (see Chapter 28, Omniscience) in the interest of human freedom. Hasdai Crescas (1340–1410), born in Barcelona, imprisoned for “desecrating the host,” but later, as a courtier, charged by the Crown with rehabilitating Spanish Jewry after the terrible anti-Jewish riots of 1391. Crescas addressed his task on its intellectual level through his *Light of the Lord*, a stunning critique of Aristotelian cosmology. In arguments that inspired Spinoza (who cites him as Rab Jasdaj), Crescas rejects Aristotle’s abhorrence for the void and for “actual infinity” and anticipates the ideas of gravity and multiple worlds, each with its own gravitational center. His student Joseph Albo (ca. 1360–1444) defended Judaism in the Tortosa Disputation of 1413–14 and sought to forge a philosophically defensible creed based on God, revelation, and requital, deemphasizing messianism, the sore point of Christian-Jewish polemics, but using ideas of natural law, gleaned in part from the writings of Thomas Aquinas (see Chapter 9, The Christian Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology). Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508), leader of the Jews expelled from Spain in 1492, described the ideal government of the Messianic age not as a monarchy – which is not at all the image of God’s rule – but as a mixed constitution, Mosaic in model, with “lower courts” chosen by the people to govern local matters and a high court, appointed by the ruler, to institute the overarching legal structure. Abravanel’s son Judah, known as Leone Ebreo (ca. 1460–ca. 1521), in his *Dialoghi d’amore*, celebrates love as a cosmic and spiritual force that pervades nature, from the mutual attraction of the elements to the divine love that unites the cosmos and draws the mind toward God. Judah Messer Leon (ca. 1425–ca. 1495), in his *Book of the Honeycomb’s Flow*, draws on Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian to analyze the poetics of the Hebrew Bible, finding in its appeals to human sensibilities no detriment to the text but marks of divine artistry, to be emulated by human orators and authors. Just as the title of the *Fons Vitae* (“Fountain of Life”) is drawn from the

Psalms to show the affinity between biblical and Neoplatonic ideas, Messer Leon chose a title from the Psalms (19:10), invoking scriptural support for his humanist thesis. Biblical rhetoric is the honey here: God's law is a work of natural artistry, praised not only for its truth and justice but for its beauty (see Chapter 35, Beauty).

Among the modern exponents of Jewish philosophy, few rank with those already mentioned. Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86), grandfather of the composer, is one. He was called the German Socrates, in part for his original arguments for immortality in his *Phaedo* or *Phaidon*. Academic entree was out of the question for a Jew in Mendelssohn's time, and his outpouring of brilliant works was produced while he earned his living as managing director of a silk factory. Imbued with traditional and philosophical Jewish learning, he mastered Wolff and Leibniz independently and became a paragon of the culture and literary language of the Enlightenment. Mendelssohn won fame by taking the prize in the Berlin Academy competition of 1763. Kant won honorable mention (see Chapter 12, Early Modern Philosophical Theology on the Continent). The first Jew to be accepted among modern European intellectuals, Mendelssohn inspired his friend Gotthold Lessing's play *Nathan the Wise*, and his idea of immortality as unending moral progress was foundational for Kant.

Pressed by critics to justify his loyalty to his ancient faith, Mendelssohn responded in *Jerusalem* with a comprehensive philosophy of Judaism, arguing that it was not their religious beliefs that Israel acquired at Sinai, since these were simply the natural religion that their reason already knew. What was revealed, and eternally valid, was a system of practices designed to sustain Israel's loyalty to that faith, making them "a light unto the nations." Enforcement of these ceremonial symbols had passed, with the destruction of the ancient Hebrew commonwealth, from that state to the hearts of individuals, where providence decreed it should forever abide. Mendelssohn thus blunted the accusations of illiberality and the somewhat inconsistent charges of dual loyalties that were already becoming clichés of anti-Semitic modernism, but only by forswearing the social authority of Judaic institutions and forestalling the first modern glimmerings of Zionism. A founding figure of the Jewish Enlightenment, the *Haskalah*, Mendelssohn worked to elevate his fellow Jews by championing German-Jewish education, translating the Pentateuch, Psalms, and Song of Songs, and effectively combating such civil disabilities as the infamous oath *more Judaico*.

Hermann Cohen (1842–1918) was the son of a cantor and son-in-law of the splendid Hebrew liturgical composer Lewandowski. He became a major Kantian, an early critic of the *Ding an sich*, who supplemented Kantian ethics with Aristotelian and biblical ideas of virtue and justice. Cohen was the first Jew to hold a philosophy chair in Prussia. Ortega y Gasset, Nicolai Hartmann, Rudolf Bultmann, Karl Barth, Boris Pasternak, and Ernst Cassirer came to Marburg as his students. Cohen saw creation as emblematic of God's transcendent uniqueness. But that uniqueness had positive meaning, he argued, because God's being is shared: immanent in the world – even if, thereby, limited.

The idea of creation (as act and work), Cohen held, allows Maimonides to overcome the sheer negativity of negative theology, negating privations and privileging perfections: The wisdom and bounty that inspired minds find in nature prompt the thoughts that point toward infinite perfection (see Chapter 25, Perfect Being Theology): "God is not inert; this means: he is the *originative principle of activity* ... 'sufficient to produce



things besides himself.' In these words the omnipotence of God acquires the meaning of a genuine attribute, which negates the negativity contained in a privation" (1972, p. 64).

Biblically, Cohen writes, creation does not begin from chaos, as if in myth. Chaos (*tohu ve-bohu*) is but an early stage of creation. Flawed as myth is, emanation, its Neoplatonic rival and sometime alternative, slips too readily into a material mode, sucking God into nature, and theology into pantheism: "Creation is necessary in order that the prejudice that makes being identical with becoming, the prejudice in which pantheism has its logical root, should not persist. Creation is God's primary attribute; it is not only the consequence of the uniqueness of God's being; creation is simply identical with it. If the unique God were not creator, being and becoming would be the same; nature itself would be God. This, however, would mean: God is not. For nature is the becoming that needs God as its foundation" (p. 67).

For monotheism, Cohen argues, creation is intrinsically ethical. The act of creation brings with it a commitment to sustenance: "The men of the Great Synagogue have established this thought in the daily prayer: 'In His goodness He constantly renews each day the work of the beginning.'" Their prooftext: the psalmist's exhortation to acknowledge God's infinite goodness (Psalms 136:7) in making heaven's great lights, continuously (*tamid*) renewing the act of creation. By transforming the moment of origin into a continual renewing, the psalm "idealizes the beginning" – in the interest of the ethical: "as is indicated in the prayer by one word *goodness* ... the originative principle does not only stand for the first beginning – this would be mythological – but has to establish permanence and therefore continuous preservation as well" (p. 68).

But the constant renewal (and continuous proof) of God's active presence is no mere iteration. For "it is not the case that becoming is always the same." Rather, the finite is always new. "The steady renewal on each day is the bridge between the infinite and the finite. ... The problem of creation transfers its meaning from the realm of causality to the realm of teleology" (p. 69), opening the door to ethics and to the human role in partnership with God, in creation.

As a public intellectual, Cohen championed the loyalty and authentic Germanness of German Jews against attacks from the anti-Semitic historian Heinrich von Treitschke, in part by marking the affinities of Jewish values with Kantian ethics. In *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*, he made God the moral standard and guarantor of justice and charity that seek to create a community of free individuals, a kingdom of ends that philosophy cannot prove to be inevitable but that personal conviction must uphold (see Chapter 23, The Jewish Tradition).

Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929) nearly abandoned Judaism but discovered its inner spirituality at the Yom Kippur services he attended in 1913, out of a desire to enter Christianity not as a pagan but as a Jew. An important Hegel scholar, Rosenzweig uncovered a more liberal, less Machiavellian Hegel than was familiar in his time. His *Star of Redemption*, written largely in postcards home from the German trenches during World War I, is a manifesto of spiritual existentialism that breaks with the classic primacy of the (intellectualist) Logos and foregrounds the immediacy of creation, encountered, rather than understood, more mythic than rational. We escape mythic atemporality, he urges, not through reason but through revelation, which speaks to us, primordially, in a command to love God, and, therefore, our fellow humans.

Revelation creates community, and community creates the individual, capable of dialogue with God. Thus the birth of the I-Thou relationship, crucial to several philosophers of the day, including Buber.

Rosenzweig's discontent with Hegel moved him to set creation at his metaphysical triangle's base and call it the heart of his work: What was in the beginning, *pace* John's gospel, was *not* the Word. That only confuses idea with reality, utterance with object. "God spoke. That came second." In the beginning, God created, shaping the YES of being with the NO of nothingness, carving finitude and overcoming the divide between compulsion and caprice. The world was, but it was no mere entailment. It was new, astounding, radically contingent, individual and full of individuals. Body filled up spirit, asserting itself, seizing an identity: "The creative power of the manifest God manifests itself in serene vitality, and the caprice of the concealed God reposes at the base of this power" (Rosenzweig 1971, p. 116).

Emanation once again was the enemy, its newest avatar, reducing nature to God's idea – and thought to a mechanism of logic. Neoplatonists (and Kabbalists) in effect had collapsed the world into its source, leaving nature unborn in God's bosom. Myth had long confounded nature with divinity, animating the world with spirits. But idealists fused or confused nature with culture, denying the world its reality. Only revelation breaks the lethal spell, presenting the past as past, the age of creation, and freeing the present for revelation, and the future for redemption.

Experience, for Rosenzweig (following up on a Kantian theme, six years before Heidegger's *Being and Time*), is always temporal. But revealed truth is beyond time: God commands not just Adam (Genesis 1:9) but every consciousness to love him, and to love humankind. The rightful response, Abraham's *hineni*, "here am I" (Genesis 22:1), is daily renewed in an act of acceptance, opening the dialogue of I with Thou: man with God and our human fellows. These encounters preserve the soul, which scientific psychology itches to disperse; and they save the community, which impersonality threatens to negate. Israel is such a community, already redeemed but bearing promises of a wider redemption – for "love is strong as death" (Song of Songs 8:6).

The star of David, signified in Rosenzweig's title, is his emblem of the dynamic relations of creation, revelation, and redemption that link God, man, and the universe. Like Mendelssohn, Rosenzweig translated much of the Bible into German, collaborating with Buber, who completed the work on his death. He helped found the Free Jewish House of Learning in Frankfurt and translated Halevi's liturgical poetry. But, unlike Halevi, Rosenzweig saw Israel's intimacy with God as a contact with eternity that somehow draws Jews out of history, living redemption while the world prepares for it in more material ways. He thus opposed Zionism, and, perhaps as tellingly, told an inquirer who asked whether he prayed with *tefillin*, "Not yet."

Martin Buber (1878–1965) was raised in the home of his grandfather Solomon Buber, a well-known scholar of Midrash. He studied with Dilthey and Simmel, became a youthful Zionist leader, and was drawn to the tales of the Hasidic Master Nahman of Bratslav, which he adapted in German. His novels gave modern Jews friendly access to the Hasidic world, and his Zionism proposed a Jewish-Arab community in Palestine, where he settled in 1938. His *I and Thou* (1922) foregrounds the relationality of human with human and of human with God. We constitute both self and other in radically different ways when we *use* an it or encounter a *thou*. Authenticity, freedom, even

genuine presentness depend on the I-Thou relation. God is the eternal Thou, never made an it by spiritual fatigue, but glimpsed through human encounters with others, and with art. When we speak to God, not about him, we encounter the living presence. Revelation is humanity's continuing response to that presence, epitomized in Israel's covenant with God.

Emmanuel Levinas (1906–95), a Midrashic thinker, a master of aspects, and thus a phenomenologist, is much admired by postmodernists in part for shunning the trappings of sustained metaphysical argument and system with the same discomfort that post-Holocaust musicians may show for melody. Levinas privileged ethics over metaphysics. In speaking of the claims made upon us by the face of the other, he speaks, in his own way, of the same person whose cloak and millstone the Torah commands us not to take in pledge, the stranger whom we are commanded to love and told that God loves, the same thou that Buber and Rosenzweig find at the roots of our humanity and God's commanding word – although Levinas quarrels with Buber's somewhat romantic construal of the I-Thou relation. In the dialectic of rabbinic thought Levinas finds a very Hebrew awareness of the everpresent face of the other. But he admires Rosenzweig for refusing to subjectivize nature in the post-Kantian mode, and thus for respecting the inalienable otherness of the other. Cautious of the mere posit of God as the parent who authorizes or commands our respect for one another, Levinas sees a trace of divine transcendence in the sheer alterity of the other, a trace that he connects with the biblical dictum that one cannot see God's face and with the Maimonidean gloss that when Moses was allowed to see God's "back," it was a "trace" of God – here understood as the ethical demand of alterity – that he was vouchsafed to know, and thus to enshrine in the Law.

Emil Fackenheim (1916–2003), arrested by the Nazis on Kristallnacht and sent to the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen, escaped to Britain and was joined by his parents, although he lost his brother, who had remained in Germany. Interned by the British as an enemy alien, Fackenheim was exiled to Canada, where he pursued an academic career in Toronto, before settling in Israel in 1984. His intellectual work included studies of Avicenna's doctrine of love and Hegel's religious ideas, but he was best known for the prominence his work gave the Holocaust. His existential conclusions, like the determination of Malamud's protagonist in *The Fixer*, were summed up in what Fackenheim called the 614th commandment: the imperative "not to give Hitler a posthumous victory" – that is, the obligation to find some mode of action or expression that will strengthen and affirm Jewish vitality and commitment.

Pausing now to sum up what the philosophers we have considered have in common – a question perhaps best addressed empirically rather than begged prescriptively – we find that in every period the exponents of Jewish philosophy share the prophetic concern to interpret the ethical socially and the social ethically. They share the Mosaic reliance on cosmology to probe the metaphysics of divinity, even when they fight shy (as Moses did) of efforts to bring God to terms in fanciful narratives or bring him to his knees in the graven images of theory. They remain sensitive to the absoluteness of the Mosaic I AM, which stands out so sharply against the ground of Parmenides' sheer affirmation of being (*esti*). For in the I AM, which will anchor the Decalogue in an intuition that all Israel must grasp for themselves, God speaks in the first person and in language that does not negate appearances but welcomes humanity and invites our acceptance of



nature and of one another. Objectivity does not exclude but presupposes subjecthood, and subjecthood does not entail but excludes mere subjectivity.

All the philosophers we have considered are in touch with their surroundings. None speaks a language too remote to be translated or uses an idiom that the others cannot catch, or trusts in categories incommensurate with those of humanity at large. Their philosophies are neither symptoms of a *Zeitgeist* nor apologetics for a *Volksgeist* but products of reflection, enlivened by a tradition of critical thought and discourse. That reflection is made critical in part by its openness to the larger philosophical world, the world of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics and Epicureans, the Neoplatonists and Muslim philosophers and theologians, the work of Thomas or the Renaissance humanists, of Leibniz, Kant, and Hegel, the phenomenologists, existentialists, and postmoderns. Among these voices, the exponents of Jewish philosophy have been prominent and original participants, just as Josephus is among historians, or Saul Bellow among novelists. Their stance is creative, not merely (as Hitler thought) “parasitic” or reactive. Their creativity is fostered by the wealth of their own traditions and by the crosstalk of their philosophical milieu.

In every period there are certain Jewish thinkers, or thinkers of Jewish origin, whose work cannot be classed as a contribution to Jewish philosophy. One thinks of those who succumbed to conversionary pressures in the medieval or the modern age and of those who internalized the anti-Jewish hostilities they felt. More broadly, certain major thinkers whose ideas are inspired by Jewish sources are not participants in the conversation of Jewish philosophy. Marx and Freud must be numbered among these. They paid a price for their cosmopolitanism, in free or forced alienation from their Jewish roots when they entered the mainstream of Western culture. Spinoza is a special case. His philosophy is deeply immersed in the great problematics of the Western tradition and in the arguments that Jewish philosophers used to grapple with those problematics. What makes it hard to count Spinoza as a contributor to Jewish philosophy is not that he did not confine himself to a philosophy of Judaism – for no major Jewish philosopher did that – but that the circumstances of his life and epoch turned him decisively away from the methods of accommodation and critical appropriation that other Jewish philosophers found. The result was a rupture that led to greater radicalism – both creativity and hostility – than is found in those who were able, or enabled, to keep faith with the generations of their Jewish predecessors and contemporaries.

The outcome of such radicalism is striking, for such thinkers, in their moment, like any alienated person, become isolated both from some of the constraints and from some of the resources of a human community that might have been of help to them. Later Jewish thinkers can still profit from what Spinoza, Marx, or Freud achieved. Parts of their thought become dated and provincialized by the very topicality that once made them flaming matter. Other elements are reabsorbed into the continuing conversation of philosophy at large or the particular foci of Jewish philosophical conversation. One cannot say, moralistically, that such thinkers, who are alienated to one degree or another, by choice or exclusion or force of circumstance, have thereby lost more than they gained. For there is a deep potential for conceptual value to be gleaned in radicalism. But radicalism, like heresy, limits catholicity, blunts synthesis, focuses attention sharply on a single issue or nexus of issues, and may stress to the breaking point. Just as there is balance in community and value in synthesis, there is philosophical and not

just practical wisdom in an irenic posture toward the philosophical past. Thus, when the prophets reflect on the future of human thinking, they envision all nations turning to a purer language (Zephaniah 3:9), and part of that vision is a reconciling of the fathers to the sons (Malachi 3:24).

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## Christianity

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Christianity's complex relations with philosophy can be approached from three angles – by surveying the problems which Christian philosophy of religion must address, by examining Christian theism's impact on Western philosophy and the resources it provides for solving problems arising within that tradition, and by considering Christianity's ambivalent attitudes toward philosophy.

### Philosophical Problems Associated with Christianity

Christian theism is a specification of more generic religious conceptions. At the most general level, it is an instance of William James' "religious hypothesis":

- 1 There is a higher universe.
- 2 We are better off if we believe this and act accordingly.
- 3 Communion with the higher universe "is a process wherein work is really done," and effects produced in the visible world.

James's "higher universe" can be interpreted in a number of ways, however, such as an impersonal power or force, as "emptiness," as cosmic law, and so on. Theists construe it as God – an omniscient mind, an omnipotent will, an unlimited love. Christians are distinguished from other theists by their understanding of the Godhead as both one and three, and by their belief that God has redeemed the world through Jesus of Nazareth.

Many philosophical difficulties which the literature associates with Christianity are problems for any religious worldview. Whether religious hypotheses are metaphysically otiose, for example, and naturalism sufficient. Or whether religious language is cognitively meaningful and (if it is) what kind of meaning it has (see Chapter 41, Religious Language). Or whether experience of the "higher universe" is genuinely possible. Of the remaining difficulties, most are problems for any standard form of theism – whether God's existence can be proved, whether and how omnipotence (see Chapter 27, Omnipotence) and other divine attributes can be defined, whether such properties as timelessness (see Chapter 32, Eternity) and providential activity are consistent, whether miracles are possible or likely, whether God's foreknowledge and human

freedom (see Chapter 56, Foreknowledge and Human Freedom) are compatible, and so on. The problem of evil is particularly acute for theists since they believe that an omnipotent and morally perfect God knowingly permits it (see Chapter 58, The Logical Problem of Evil; and Chapter 59, The Evidential Problem of Evil). (However, some form of the difficulty besets any religious worldview which maintains, as most do, that reality is fundamentally good.) Other problems are common to Christianity and to some but not all non-Christian forms of theism. An example is the tension between strong doctrines of grace such as those found in Christianity and (for example) Sri Vaisnavism or Siva Siddhanta, and human responsibility. Another is the “scandal of particularity” – the potential conflict between doctrines of God’s justice and love, and the belief that salvation depends on a conscious relation to historical persons or events that are unknown (and thus, on the face of it, inaccessible) to large numbers of people. Thus, most of the philosophical problems associated with Christian theism are not peculiar to Christianity. But some are. Obvious examples are difficulties associated with the Trinity, the Incarnation or atonement, and original sin (see Chapter 72, Sin and Original Sin).

Christian theism may also provide unique resources for dealing with problems common to other theistic or religious systems. Marilyn Adams, for example, has recently argued that Christian theism furnishes materials for handling the problem of evil. Discussions of the issue typically assume that the system of rights and obligations connects all rational agents, and that a satisfactory solution of the problem must show that evils are logically necessary conditions or consequences of “religiously neutral” goods like pleasure, knowledge, or friendship. Both assumptions are suspect. God escapes the network of rights and obligations in virtue of God’s transcendence. Furthermore, God and communion with God don’t just surpass temporal goods; they are incommensurable with them. The beatific vision will therefore “engulf” any finite evils one has suffered. Adams also suggests that Christian theodacists should explore the implications of such goods as Christian martyrdom and Christ’s passion. Suffering may be a means of participating in Christ, thereby providing the sufferer with insight into, and communion with, God’s inner life. Adams’s first suggestion is available to other theists, but her second is not.

Christian philosophers in the Middle Ages addressed all of these issues. Since Descartes, they have largely confined themselves to discussing generic questions. However, there are two exceptions. Since the early 1980s, Christian analytic philosophers have turned their attention to uniquely Christian issues. Richard Swinburne’s work on the atonement, Thomas Morris’ book on the Incarnation, and the essays collected in *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* are important examples. The other notable exception is Immanuel Kant’s and G. W. F. Hegel’s philosophical reconstructions of such peculiarly Christian doctrines as original sin and the Trinity.

## Christian Theism and Western Philosophy

Some intellectual historians have claimed that Christian theism’s encounter with Greek thought profoundly altered the course of Western philosophy. For example, Etienne Gilson has argued that the Christian notion of God as a self-existent act of existence that freely bestows actuality on created beings had revolutionary consequences. The

basic ontological dividing line was no longer between unity and multiplicity, or between the immaterial and material, as it was in Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus, but between a God who exists necessarily, on the one hand, and created (and therefore contingent) being, on the other (see Chapter 37, Creation and Conservation). As a result, philosophy was forced to draw a sharp distinction between a thing's being and its being a certain kind of thing, i.e., between its existence and its essence. Philosophy no longer confined itself to asking, with the Greeks, "how is the world ordered, and what accounts for its order?" (see Chapter 8, Ancient Philosophical Theology). It also asked, "why does any world exist and not nothing?" The being of things as well as their order was problematized. Others contend that these themes had further consequences. Pursuing suggestions of M. B. Foster and A. N. Whitehead, Eric Mascall has maintained that Christian theism cleared a metaphysical space within which modern science became possible. Since the Christian God is a God of reason and order, any world God creates will exhibit pattern and regularity. But because God *freely* creates the world, its order will be contingent. The world's structures cannot be deduced *a priori*, then, but must be discovered by observation and experiment. Others have claimed that Christian theism's desacralization of nature also helps explain why modern science arose in the West and not elsewhere. Christian theism maintains that nothing contingent is inherently holy. Places (Sinai, Jerusalem), persons (prophets, priests, divinely anointed kings), artifacts (the ark), and so on aren't intrinsically holy; any holiness they possess is extrinsic – conferred upon them from without by God. Nature is no longer regarded as divine and therefore becomes an appropriate object for manipulation and detached observation.

However, while these claims may point to important truths, they are overstated. The conception of God in question is not peculiarly Christian, for Muslims and Jews share it. Nor is the desacralization of nature a uniquely Western phenomenon (it occurs in Hinayana Buddhism). Furthermore, that the created order is contingent is a consequence of at least one major form of Indian theism – Ramanuja's (1017–1137) Visistadvaita Vedanta. The world's "material" ("prakritic") substrate necessarily exists (for the world in either its latent or manifest form is God's body), but the phenomenal world or manifest universe does not. God is free to create it or not (i.e., God is free either to bring the world from an unmanifest to a manifest state or not to do so), and to give it any order God pleases.

Christian theism does appear to be largely responsible for the importance of the free will problem in Western philosophy. Neither Plato's nor Aristotle's philosophical psychology contains anything that precisely corresponds to the will. Augustine is the first to clearly recognize that some moral failures cannot be plausibly ascribed to imperfections of reason or desire, and to attribute them to a misuse of will. Again, while Aristotle's discussion of voluntary and involuntary action is quite sophisticated, he does not clearly ask whether human freedom and moral responsibility are compatible with universal causal determination. Christian theism's emphasis on the will, heightened sense of humanity's moral responsibility, and vivid awareness of God's sovereignty and causal universality made this problem acute. Works like Augustine's *On Free Choice of the Will* and his anti-Pelagian writings, Anselm's *On Freedom of Choice* and *The Fall of Satan*, and Jonathan Edwards' *Freedom of the Will* raise issues which aren't squarely addressed in ancient philosophy and discuss them with a sophistication and

thoroughness which are absent in their Indian counterparts. (Indian philosophy examines these issues in connection with the doctrines of karma and God's sovereign causal activity. But the discussions are brief and comparatively unsophisticated. Ramanuja, for example, argues that God's causal sovereignty is preserved because God is the free agent's existential support and because God "consents" to their free actions, i.e., allows them to be actualized. Ramanuja thus resolves the tension between human freedom and God's causal sovereignty by restricting the latter's range. This is to dissolve the problem, not solve it.) Arguably, both the distinctions drawn and the moves made in secular discussions of the free will problem, and the importance ascribed to it, have their ultimate roots in these theological discussions.

Some Christian philosophers believe that the resources of Christian philosophy can be used to "solve" or illuminate philosophical problems arising independently of theism. Two examples will suffice. First, if natural laws are no more than constant conjunctions (as David Hume thought), they will not support counterfactuals. That striking a match is always followed by its bursting into flame does not imply that if a match were struck in certain counterfactual situations, it would burst into flame. For the conjunction could be accidental. Of course, if laws of nature were necessary truths, they would support counterfactuals. But they aren't. What is needed is an account of natural laws that respects both their subjunctive character and their contingency. Jonathan Edwards regarded them as expressions of God's settled intentions with respect to the natural world, descriptions of his habitual manner of acting. Del Ratzsch has recently argued that views of this sort can provide a more adequate account of the subjunctive character of natural laws than non-theistic alternatives. Second, other philosophers have claimed that theism alone can adequately account for the objectivity and inescapability of moral value (see Chapter 45, *Moral Arguments*; and Chapter 68, *Divine Command Ethics*). Suppose that God is the standard of moral goodness, or that moral values are necessary contents of the divine intellectual activity, or that an action's obligatory character consists in God's having commanded it. Moral facts will then be objective in the sense that they are not human constructs. If God exists necessarily, then (on the first two views), moral truths are necessary. If God necessarily exists and necessarily commands that (for example) we tell the truth, then truth telling is necessarily obligatory on the third view as well. Views of this sort can also do a better job of accommodating two apparently conflicting intuitions: that moral values exist in minds, and that morality cannot command our allegiance unless it expresses a deep fact about reality. But whatever merit these solutions to wider philosophical problems have, they are not specifically Christian. For they are also available to other theists.

### Christianity's Attitude Toward Philosophy

Christianity's attitude toward philosophy has been ambivalent. One strand of the tradition is openly hostile. Its seminal figure is Tertullian (155–222).

Tertullian does not deny that the writings of the philosophers contain truths. Nor does he deny that God can be (imperfectly) grasped without the aid of revelation. For God can be known from God's works and by the interior witness of our souls. Philosophy is nonetheless repudiated. "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? the Academy



and the Church? What concord is there between heretics and Christians? Our instruction comes from the porch of Solomon, who had himself taught that the Lord should be sought in simplicity of heart. Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition. We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ, no inquisition after enjoying the Gospel" (Roberts and Donaldson 1950, vol. 3, p. 246). Tertullian's objection is threefold. First the introduction of philosophy among Christians has resulted in heresy. Second, whereas schools of philosophy have human founders, the school of the gospel is founded by God. Christianity is a *revealed* doctrine that demands obedience and submission. Philosophy, by contrast, relies on *human* wisdom and is an expression of self-seeking and of a fallible and corrupt reason. Finally (and most profoundly), the mysteries of faith *repel* reason. "The Son of God died; it is by all means to be believed because it is absurd. And he was buried, and rose again; the fact is certain because it is impossible" (Roberts and Donaldson 1950, vol. 3, p. 535). Christian philosophy is a contradiction in terms because Christianity's truths are impenetrable to reason.

Tertullian is by no means alone. In the Christian Middle Ages, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) claimed that those who "called themselves philosophers should rather be called the slaves of curiosity and pride." The true teacher is the Holy Spirit, and those who have been instructed by God can "say with the Psalmist (Psalm 119:99) *I have understood more than all my teachers.*" Commenting on this text, Bernard exclaims: "Wherefore, O my brother, does thou make such a boast? Is it because ... thou has understood or hast endeavored to understand the reasonings of Plato and the subtleties of Aristotle? God forbid! thou answerest. It is because I have sought Thy commandments, O Lord" (Gilson 1938, pp. 12–13).

This attitude persists and is especially prominent in the Protestant reformers and among the skeptical fideists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (see Chapter 52, Fideism).

An equally important, and ultimately more widespread, attitude toward philosophy was expressed by Justin Martyr (105–65), Clement of Alexandria (150–215), and Origen (185–254). Philosophy is a preparation for the gospel. According to Clement, for example, it was "a schoolmaster to bring the Hellenic mind, as the Law, the Hebrews, to Christ" (Roberts and Donaldson 1950, vol. 2, p. 305). This positive attitude toward philosophy was supported in two ways. The first was the "loan" hypothesis: the truths in Greek philosophy were ultimately plagiarized from Moses and the prophets. The second was the Logos theory: all human beings participate in the Logos – God's eternal word or wisdom who became incarnate in Jesus Christ. The Greek writers were thus, as Justin says, "able to see realities darkly through the sowing of the implanted word that was in them." Since "Christ ... is the Word of whom every race of men were partakers, ... those who lived reasonably are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists; as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and men like them" (Roberts and Donaldson 1950, vol. 1, pp. 193, 178). And both Clement and Origen believe that the Logos is the archetype of which human reason is the copy.

It is important to notice, however, that while these doctrines make a positive evaluation of Greek philosophy possible, they also imply philosophy's inferiority to revelation. The loan hypothesis implies that the truths found in philosophy are fragmented and mixed with error. Whatever authority they have depends on their origin. Only in



scripture can truth be found whole and undistorted. The Logos theory implies that Christians are better off than the philosophers. For, as Justin says, Christians “live not according to a part only of the word diffused [among men] but by the knowledge and contemplation of the whole Word, which is Christ” (Roberts and Donaldson 1950, vol. 1, p. 191).

Even so, philosophy isn’t *just* a preparation for the gospel. Both Clement and Origen believe that our blessedness consists in knowing or understanding the Good, and that philosophy can be employed to deepen our understanding of the truths of scripture in which that Good reveals itself. The seminal treatment of this theme is Augustine’s.

Revelation is a safer and surer guide to truth than philosophy. Any truths about God taught by the philosophers can be found in scripture as well, but unmixed with error and enriched by other truths. Reason and philosophy aren’t to be despised, however. Reason is needed to understand what is proposed for belief and to make the divine speaker’s claims to authority credible. Nor should reason be discarded once faith has been achieved. “God forbid that He should hate in us that faculty by which He has made us superior to all other living beings. Therefore, we must refuse so to believe as not to receive or seek a reason for our belief ...” (Augustine 1953, p. 302). The mature Christian will therefore use reason and the insights of philosophy to understand (to the extent possible) what he already believes. But faith remains a precondition of the success of this enterprise. For some things must first be believed to be understood. “Therefore the prophet said with reason: ‘If you will not believe, you will not understand’” (Augustine 1953, p. 302). Augustine is principally thinking, in this passage, of the Christian “mysteries” (the Trinity, Incarnation, and so on). Yet he clearly believes that sound faith is needed for *any* adequate understanding of God. (But it is not needed for grasping some truths about God. The “Platonists” lacked faith yet not only affirmed God’s existence and the immortality of the soul but also that the Logos or Word was born of God and that all things were made by God.)

Augustine’s attitudes toward philosophy are echoed by Anselm and dominate the Christian Middle Ages. Modern Christian attitudes toward philosophy are, on the whole, variants of those seminally expressed by Tertullian and Augustine.

Closer inspection reveals that the two views are not always as sharply opposed as at first appears. Consider, for example, the attitudes toward reason expressed by Puritan divines, on the one hand, and by the Cambridge Platonists who opposed their so-called “dogmatism” and “narrow sectarianism” on the other.

As good Calvinists, Puritans believed that while reason was competent in “civill and humane things,” it was not competent in divine things. Because of the fall, “the whole speculative power of the higher and nobler part of the Soule, which wee call the Understanding ... is naturally and originally corrupted, and utterly destitute of all Divine Light” (Robert Bolton, quoted in Morgan 1986, p. 47). Francis Quarles therefore recommends, “In the Meditation of divine Mysteries, keep thy heart humble, and thy thoughts holy: Let Philosophy not be asham’d to be confuted, nor Logic blush to be confounded. ... The best way to see day-light is to put out thy Candle [reason]” (Patrides 1970, p. 9). The Cambridge Platonists sounded a very different note. “Reason is the Divine governor of man’s life; it is the very voice of God” (Benjamin Whichcote, quoted in Powicke 1970 [1926], p. 23). According to John Smith, it is “a Light flowing from the Foundation and Father of Lights.” Reason was given “to enable Man to work out

of himself all those Notions of God which are the true Ground-work of Love and Obedience to God, and conformity to him" (Smith 1978 [1660], p. 382). Scripture simply reinforces and clarifies what a properly functioning reason discerns.

Neither position, however, is as extreme as this suggests. Many Puritan diatribes against reason are expressions of Puritanism's emphasis on experience and not of a belief that reason's "notional" understanding of religion is invariably false. As Arthur Dent says, "The knowledge of the reprobate is like the knowledge which a mathematicall geographer hath of the earth and all the places in it, which is but a generall notion, and a speculative comprehension of them. But the knowledge of the elect is like the knowledge of a traveler which can speake of experience and feeling, and hath beene there and seene" (Morgan 1986, p. 59).

Puritans also insisted that God's word is *intrinsically* rational. "The Sunne is ever cleere" although we are prevented from seeing it because "wee want eyes to behold it" or because it is "so be-clowded, that our sight is thereby hindered" (Richard Bernard, quoted in Morgan 1986, p. 55). Furthermore, grace can cure our blindness and remove the clouds. *Regenerate* reason can unfold scripture and defend the faith. Puritan divines were therefore prepared, in practice, to ascribe a high instrumental value to reason and humane learning. As John Rainolds said, "It may be lawfull for Christians to use Philosophers, and books of Secular Learning ... with this condition, that whatsoever they finde in them, that is profitable and usefull, they convert it to Christian doctrine and do, as it were, shave off ... all superfluous stuffe" (Morgan 1986, p. 113). Even a radical Puritan like John Penry could insist that "the Lord doth not ordinarily bestowe [full comprehension of the Word] ... without the knowledge of the artes," especially rhetoric and logic, Hebrew and Greek (Morgan 1986, p. 106). Logic, indeed, was so important that the missionary John Eliot translated a treatise on it into Algonquin "to initiate the Indians in the knowledge of the Rule of Reason" (Miller 1961 [1939], p. 114).

The Cambridge Platonists' exaltation of reason must be similarly qualified. Because of the fall, reason is "but an old MS., with some broken periods, some letters worn out," it is a picture which has "lost its gloss and beauty, the oriency of its colours ... the comeliness of its proportions" (Powicke 1970, p. 30). As a consequence, divine assistance is now necessary. And God has provided it. Not only is there "an Outward revelation of God's will to men [scripture], there is also an Inward impression of it on their Minds and Spirits. ... We cannot see divine things but in a divine light" (Smith 1978, p. 384). "Right reason" is indeed sufficient to discern the things of God, but right reason is sanctified reason. Henry More speaks for all the Cambridge Platonists when he says, "The oracle of God [reason] is not to be heard but in his Holy Temple – that is to say in a good and holy man, thoroughly sanctified in Spirit, Soul and body" (More 1978 [1662], vol. 1, p. viii).

The dispute between the Puritans and Cambridge Platonists is typical of similar disputes in the history of traditional Christianity. Attacks on the use of reason and philosophy are seldom unqualified. (Tertullian himself was strongly influenced by Stoicism.) The reason which is commended, on the other hand, is what the seventeenth century called "right reason" – a reason that is informed by the divine light and is an expression of a properly disposed heart. Conflicting views on the relation between faith and reason or philosophy within traditional Christianity are, for the most part, less a matter of outright opposition than of difference in emphasis.

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# Philosophy in the Islamic Context

AZIZ A. ESMAIL AND AZIM A. NANJI

## Defining the Subject

In the Islamic context, defining the idea of philosophy of religion, with all the key terms it entails, is not a mere formality. It is in fact fatal to creativity in this area to take such terms as "religion" and "Islam" (or "Islamic"), indeed even "philosophy," for granted. Aliveness to the dangers of taking such terms for granted, as though they were settled rather than provisional facts, is of course essential to the very enterprise of philosophy. But in the Islamic context this awareness is doubly important. In the past few decades there have been notable advances in research and scrutiny of source materials by specialists in this field. Yet one is left with the impression that while we now have more knowledge of the field and greater access to original sources than was the case, say, half a century ago, uncertainties over a precise definition and demarcation of the field remain as pressing as ever.

The foremost issue is whether "Islamic philosophy" is an accurate description of the work of the figures in the history of Islam who saw themselves or could be seen by us as "philosophers." Some scholars in the past, finding this characterization unsatisfactory, proposed to substitute "Arabic" for "Islamic" (see Fakhry 1983, p. xv; while emphasizing the Arabic element in the philosophy, the author also attributes to Islam the universality and maturity of the civilization of which he was a part). But this alternative is also liable to mislead, not least by introducing an ethnic or national connotation in a tradition which was Arabic only in the language in which it was carried. For this reason alone, if not for the additional reason proposed by Henry Corbin, who insisted on including a much larger body of material, much of it mystical, and some of it in Persian, one may do well to reject the term "Arabic" while acknowledging its usefulness in avoiding the tendentious propensities in the term "Islamic" (Corbin 1993).

These propensities are in some ways peculiar to the modern history of Islam. There is a marked trend, in this period, to trace almost every aspect of the remarkably multifarious phenomenon which we know of as the classical Islamic civilization to the inspiration and teachings of the original revelation and of the practice and precepts of the Prophet Muhammad. This view, which is more dogmatic than historical, produces a curious result. Alone among the great civilizations of the world, and quite anomalously, the Islamic civilization comes to be presented, in all its varied aspects, as

the offshoot of a scriptural text, bearing witness to a charismatic preaching (to use Max Weber's terminology) at an earlier period and in the very particular conditions of life in the cities of Mecca and Medina. If for no other reason than the fact that civilizations do not have such singular and all-determining sources, and do not follow such a unilinear course of development, this picture must be rejected as an oversimplification inspired by partisan, apologetic, or otherwise tendentious motives and assumptions.

This is not to diminish the power and scope of Islamic ideals and symbols in the societies and cultures which made up this civilization. What is important, rather, is to aim at a historically accurate and precise formula commensurate with the facts of the Islamic civilization.

The Islamic empire resulted from the Arab conquests which began shortly after the death of the Prophet (in 632). (For the convenience of a general reader all dates in this chapter will be given according to the Christian rather than Muslim calendar.) The civilization which flourished in this empire resulted from a complex interaction of Islamic beliefs, pre-Islamic Arab norms and customs, and the preceding cultures displaced, absorbed, or surviving in the new milieu.

At its zenith the empire extended from North Africa to northern India, over cities and regions of great antiquity and culture, such as Alexandria, Antioch, Aleppo, Damascus, Mesopotamia, and Khurasan. These lands, formerly under Roman, Persian, and Byzantine rule, were the seat of a number of intellectual, religious, and literary traditions. It is unhistorical to write off these traditions by assuming either that they were totally displaced by Islam, or that they were so completely and neatly subordinated to it as to lose their identity. It is more correct to see the Islamic civilization as a complex of these traditions – nurtured, revived, revised, extended, and in part transformed by the dynamism and creativity characteristic of the new civilization, in which the Islamic faith was an overall cohesive force, but by no means the only component.

In this brief chapter we cannot afford to develop this point further. Suffice it to say that “philosophy in the Islamic context,” the title of this piece, has been used advisedly with the above considerations in mind. It acknowledges the encompassing Islamic framework in the milieu in which this philosophy was pursued while avoiding the suggestion, in uncritical uses of the term “Islamic philosophy,” that the philosophy was no more than an extension or aspect of the Islamic faith.

Unfortunately, however, “philosophy in the Islamic context” is too cumbersome a term to employ consistently or repeatedly. The only succinct alternative would be to adopt the term “Islamicate” proposed more than three decades ago by Marshall Hodgson, who methodically distinguished it from “Islamic” (Hodgson 1974). However, his terminology failed, for whatever reason, to be adopted by students of the field. For this reason we will be obliged to fall back now and then on the shorthand term “Islamic philosophy” in the following pages. We urge the reader to treat this as no more than a shorthand, however, recalling the above qualifications.

## The Scope of Philosophy in the Islamic Context

The themes to which reference is made in this introductory chapter belong for the most part, and variously, to Abu Nasr Muhammad al-Farabi (870–950), Ibn Sina or

Avicenna (980–1037), Ibn Rushd or Averroës (1135–1204), Shihab al-Din Yahya al-Suhrawardi (1154–1191), and Mulla Sadra al-Shirazi (1571–1640) (again for the convenience of the general reader, the Latinized names of Avicenna and Averroës, now standard in non-Islamic languages, will be used here). Other philosophers or authors will be named in connection with their specific ideas.

Of these figures, the first three, who were preceded in their particular philosophic pedigree by al-Kindi (d. 866), were essentially heirs and admirers of the great Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle and their latter-day commentators, together with other Hellenistic traditions. This fact reinforces the above point about the need to understand the term “Islamic” in a discriminating and qualified rather than wholesale manner. However, it is also misleading to regard the work of these figures as merely continuing, or merely confined to, “Greek” philosophy. For one thing, they were thinkers in their own right, not simply transmitters. This remains true when an important part of their work is made up by commentary, as in the corpus of al-Farabi and Averroës.

For another thing (as shown below), the movement of translation of the philosophical works of antiquity involved men of different faiths. The third and most important factor to consider is the self-image of men like al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroës. They unquestionably saw themselves as practitioners of philosophy (*falsafa*), a subject which they saw as not only sovereign knowledge, but one which in effect transcended differences of creed, nation, race, or culture. For this reason, to enlist them for the purpose of glorification – religious, linguistic, or racial – is to go against the outlook of which they were unequivocal exemplars. In this they reflected a characteristic outlook of philosophy at its best. Neither Plato nor Aristotle saw themselves as representatives of Greek national culture. Spinoza, Hume, Kant, and Russell (to cite at random) operated on the same basis. It is the same spirit which we find in the passion with which Islamic philosophers pursued their intellectual vocation. It was a love of true knowledge, and of reason as the preferred means to it – analogous, on the intellectual plane, to the love of God in an ardent believer. This analogy (as opposed to identity) between Islamic philosophy and Islamic piety is probably significant rather than accidental, a fit subject, in its own right, for philosophical analysis.

## Sources and Legacy

The philosophical work of men from al-Kindi to Averroës – including important followers of al-Farabi not discussed here, like Ibn Bajjah (d. ca. 1139) and Ibn Tufayl (d. ca. 1185), both, like Averroës, inhabitants of Muslim Spain – was built on the ground prepared by translators. This was a conscious enterprise, sponsored by the Abbasid Caliphate at Baghdad to translate works of Hellenistic science (including the medical works of Galen) and philosophy. It is important to note the whole constellation of sciences which went together, of which metaphysics, as in Aristotle, was but a part. The movement lasted from the eighth to the tenth century. The translations included works of Plato and Aristotle (sometimes in latter-day mixed or misattributed versions), Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus, Ammonius, and John Philoponus. The translators and commentators were not confined to Muslims; the renowned translator Hunayn b. Ishaq was a Christian, and so was the author Abu Bishr Matta (d. 940), who asserted the



foundational and universal status of logic in relation to grammar. In their intellectual concerns, the translators and commentators appear to have been happily oblivious to differences of religious affiliation among them.

Once the philosophical tradition got going, it was likewise broadly encompassing. Maimonides, religiously a Jew, writing in Arabic, drew many of his ideas from al-Farabi and Avicenna. He is only the more well known among other similarly indebted Jewish philosophers. Furthermore, in an interesting parallel to the translations from Greek and Syriac, the Arabic works of philosophers and theologians in the Muslim world came to be translated into Latin, from the eleventh century onwards, first in southern Italy and Sicily, and then (from the mid-twelfth century) in Spain (principally Toledo). Their influence on Christian philosophers like Aquinas and Duns Scotus is unmistakable. Equally important is the contribution of these translations to the flowering of humanism in Europe from the late fifteenth century onwards.

The Latin translations from Arabic were wide-ranging. Through them, Europe discovered hitherto unknown, important works of the great Greek philosophers. It gained direct knowledge of the master works of towering figures like Avicenna and Averroës, as well as works of science, especially medicine. The resulting picture is a cosmopolitan tradition of inquiry and knowledge which transcends religious and cultural boundaries. It also transcends what is meant by "ecumenism," for this implies prior notice rather than disregard of religious boundaries. Nor is this continuity of Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin contributions strictly comparable to modern interdisciplinary studies. It is largely an unselfconscious unity.

## The Political Orientation of Islamic Philosophy

Not all modern scholars of the subject regard Islamic philosophy as inherently political. Some, however, have argued persuasively that it is fundamentally so (see Mahdi 1982 and Butterworth 1992). To understand this in proper perspective, however, it is necessary to put aside our modern conceptions of what is meant by "political." Modern political theory, aware of politics as a dimension of the state rather than co-terminus with the community ("the city") and, because of its often dominant positivism, all too conscious of its debased realities, stands at a great distance from its Platonic and Aristotelian counterparts. No doubt, the political realities of the ancient world were anything but uplifting. However, Plato and Aristotle thought of them as perversions of the "true" polity rather than its unavoidable face. There is no need here to argue for a preference among these alternatives. All that need be said is that appreciation of the political orientation of Islamic philosophy is bound to start on the wrong footing if the classical view is not studiously borne in mind.

The direct influence of ancient philosophy is only too evident in al-Farabi's argument that whereas theoretical reason provides general, universal principles of knowledge, particular problems of praxis call for the use of practical reason, which is concerned with the application of universal principles to necessarily unique instances. However, Islamic philosophy, unlike its ancient forebears, had to reckon with the all-important role of Islamic beliefs, symbols, and practices in its environment. Its political dimension

was shaped by this fact. Consequently, its view of religion is an integral aspect of its political understanding.

The engagement of philosophy with religion in the Islamic context amounted essentially to explaining or giving account of the latter in terms of the former. Plato had already set a blueprint for this task. True knowledge is the goal of rational dialectic, of philosophy in its literal sense, a love of wisdom, a love which, once discovered, enthalls the soul to the very end of its sojourn on earth. And yet, Plato is keen to make room for the myths and narratives in which ordinary people find meaning, solace, and the impetus to live virtuously. The myths are philosophy, so to speak, decked in enchanting robes. They are no doubt derivative, not the real thing. But they are fitting and necessary for the great majority of citizens, who have no aptitude or capacity for the exacting rigors of philosophical inquiry and argument. This formula proved immensely fruitful for philosophers in the Islamic context. It gave them categories through which to make sense of the Islamic phenomenon in the light of what they took to be universal philosophical verities. Far from ignoring or belittling the importance of Islamic belief and practice, the philosophers sought to validate it. But it was a validation from outside, not inside. Its basis lay in the authority of reason, not of revelation or tradition.

In broad terms, their reasoning on this point proceeded as follows. Truth, they assumed, is ultimately singular. It follows, logically, that religious propositions are either true or false. The philosophers were convinced that they were true. Hence they were obliged to show how both philosophy and religion could be true – that is to say, could make the same affirmations while being so manifestly distinct. It also behooved them to work out the *raison d'être* of the two distinct entities. If there is but a single set of truths, and philosophy the royal road, what accounts for the prevalence of religion?

The answer lay in the philosophers' characterization of the two modes. Philosophy advances toward its goal through demonstrative reasoning. Religion, by contrast, captures it in symbols, images, parables, and stories. This implies that the founder of a religion – in Islamic terms, the Prophet (*nabi*) – possesses an aptitude or faculty suited to an apprehension of ultimate realities in a form lending itself to symbolic expression. This, it was proposed, was the faculty of imagination. The notion is hard to pin down in English. It is important to be wary of our modern idea of imagination with its associations of fantasy and its exclusion of the intellect. (Coleridge's distinction between "fancy" and "imagination" is a valuable corrective to this modern conception; but it too has its own specific meaning in the Romantic context, which it would be misguided to generalize.)

In Islamic philosophy, the Prophet's knowledge derived from the Active Intellect, a cosmic counterpart to the intellectual faculty in man. This was a very bold proposition, effectively equating prophetic cognition with that available to any maximally developed human mind, and free of such supernatural mystery as would preclude giving a rational account of it.

The particular genius (if we may use this anachronistic term) of the Prophet is that his insights find expression in imaginative forms as mentioned above. This expressive mode has its particular *raison d'être* in the fact that the majority of the populace have no aptitude or capacity for the rigors of philosophical enquiry. Yet they deserve to be



given an intimation of the truth of things. Above all, they stand in need of motivation and guidance for virtuous conduct in the world, which is a means to their true happiness. It is worth remembering that for Islamic philosophy, as for the ancients, virtue (unlike the “moral values” of modern social science) has objective (ontological) reality. Similarly, happiness (a concept to which al-Farabi devoted a whole work), far from sensual pleasure, involves perfection of the soul through virtue.

In this way, Islamic philosophy was a perspective on Islam rather than an Islamic perspective. It was, we might say, meta-religious. In this sense, at the risk of the ambiguities and historical baggage attached to the term, it may be described, quite properly, as humanistic. Its focus was universal, eschewing distinctions of creed. It invoked no other authority than that of reason, and where it acknowledged a role for non-rational modes of knowledge or perception, it held them amenable, ultimately, to rational explanation. Above all, in its purview there was no room for religious fanaticism. For fanaticism requires a set of absolutes. By viewing religion in political terms, Islamic philosophy served to relativize religious faith – to view it as (in today’s terms) a political or “social” fact, capable of rational (scientific) interpretation.

In Europe, the image of Averroës, in particular, an image arising largely from the school of Latin Averroism, later reinforced by Ernst Renan, is of a free thinker secretly, if not openly, disdainful of religion. His works point to another, more nuanced, conclusion. His is a measured, rational, humanist assessment of religion. It is at the same time, as far as one can tell, the view of a man convinced of its ultimate truth, but simultaneously conscious of the relativity, and (given their function in society) understandable limitation of its expressions and forms. He appears genuinely appreciative (and his great predecessor Avicenna even more so) of what was after all a powerful faith welding the disparate elements of a sophisticated civilization into a measure of unity. Such a view accords an important role for religion in the furtherance of the human estate on earth. Even as it weighs religious ideas in the balance of reason and does not shirk from contradicting some of religion’s cherished tenets (as we shall see below), it maintains a greater empathy for them than modern secular culture, with its tendency to its own mode of fundamentalism, is prepared to allow.

## Some Salient Themes

The political philosophy sketched in the above section has served to introduce some key concepts, notably theoretical and political reason, and the faculties of intellect and imagination. (This alone shows that political philosophy extends more widely in this context than that of today.) Let us now look at a few other salient themes in classical Islamic philosophy. We shall confine ourselves to those that relate directly to religion.

In all monotheistic religions the notion of a single, transcendent creator-God, with dominion over the entire universe, making moral demands on humanity, holding them to account for their ways, protecting and rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked, is pivotal to the faith. In this cluster of interrelated concepts, the philosophers found a wealth of material for rational speculation. This shows, again, the philosophers’ close interest in religion. However, both their method and their considered positions on these ideas were at variance with conventional codes of belief.

In their speculation on these ideas the philosophers were building on established ground. The words of the Qur'an, which Muslims take to be an accurate and complete transcript of the revelation to Muhammad, have about them the stormy urgency and insistent eloquence of a summons on the very edge of time, offering a final choice between redemption and damnation. In such sublime furor there is no room for logical puzzles or metaphysical conundrums. The qualities of cognition and speech in the two modes are radically different. Where prophetic preaching seizes its audience and challenges one's whole way of life, rational inquiry and reflection, with its taste for method and sequence, implies a studious, dispassionate way of proceeding, in which patterns of reason are all-important.

The post-prophetic era saw an interest in ideas which in the process of revelation had remained subsumed in its existential call. Rationalization of these ideas was a feature of the discipline called (in Arabic Islam as well as Judaism) *kalam*. Its standard rendering as "theology" is at best approximate. The most prominent school of *kalam* which found political favor during the reign of al-Mamun at Baghdad (813–33) was also the most rationally orientated. Its impact on philosophy, especially via al-Kindi, who is believed to have been closely associated with the school, still awaits scholarly research.

The Mutazila are commonly characterized as rationalists because they predicted a natural order accessible to human reason. The good was likewise viewed as a natural entity, and from the requirement of human beings to choose good over evil, the Mutazila inferred the existence of free will. As to the nature of God, the Mutazila, repelled by the potential for crude anthropomorphism in depictions of God in scripture, as moved by mercy or anger, vengeance and justice, proposed that his essence was distinct from his attributes – so that the Qur'an, defined as divine speech, was a creation in time rather than eternal.

The Mutazila had thus paved the way for a rational exploration of concepts of importance to religious faith. Some of these also held the interest of philosophers, who pursued them in their own way.

The nature of God was of interest to all the philosophers mentioned so far. But whereas al-Kindi conceived of God theologically, to al-Farabi God was incidental to Being, and his anthropomorphic representation in religion is but a concession to popular imagination, which by its nature remains dependent on the senses.

The aspect of belief in God which posed the greatest perplexities to the speculative mind was creation. The act of creation, implying a "before" and an "after," implied in turn God's involvement in process, hence, in change. In particular, creation *ex nihilo*, far from the uncontentious idea believers assume it to be, spawned speculative difficulties on which considerable ink was spilled. One theory, for example, held that the objects of creation existed beforehand as ideas or constructs in the mind of God. Such theories proved hard to reconcile with the substantive unity and simplicity of God predicated, in different terms, on both religion and philosophy.

It was in this general context that Avicenna elaborated his much-discussed formulation of essence and existence. This is not the place to enlarge on this typically intricate theory which continues to inspire divergent interpretations. One aspect of his theory of existence, which he considered to be a "real" attribute of the existent (a view famously contested by Kant) deserves mention because of its extensive influence on subsequent Islamic as well as European philosophy. This was the distinction between necessary

and contingent (possible) existence. In very simple terms, this is a distinction between entities which, through intrinsic or extrinsic necessity, cannot not exist, and entities which have no compulsion to exist, but may (or may not) happen to exist. This is not the same distinction as that in modern philosophy between logical and (some) mathematical propositions which are necessarily valid, and empirical propositions which may, in principle, be either true or false. In Avicenna, necessity and contingency are attributes of substance, not (as in Kant) judgments, nor (as in subsequent philosophy) expressions in logic and language.

Avicenna further subdivided each type of existence into deriving its respective character from the intrinsic nature of the entity in question, or from an extrinsic cause. One of the consequences (and perhaps aims) of this theory was to secure the quality of necessary existence for the Supreme Being.

The resulting concept of God resonates with the majesty, primordality, and awesomeness of the God of religious belief. But “resonate” is all that it does. The God of philosophy is abstractly conceived and rationally discovered, and the reverence it inspires is, ideally, intellectual. More than the other philosophers mentioned so far, Avicenna was also intrigued by religious experience. But it is fair to say that he was at one with them in his conviction that God’s nature and existence are a valid subject for rational inquiry, and that an anthropomorphic deity is a compromised version of the pure reality of God.

## The Great Debate

By the same token, Avicenna found orthodox Muslim beliefs about creation *ex nihilo* and the resurrection of the body logically flawed. Preferring to think of creation as the perpetual dependence of contingent beings on necessary being, rather than origination, he thought of the world as eternal. In a similar rejection of orthodoxy, he argued that resurrection was possible for the soul rather than the body. It is interesting to speculate the course the history of Islamic thought would have taken if the Mutazila, or Avicenna, or (in some ways the more radical) Averroës had had a more extensive influence on the formulation of religious belief, which, it must be noted, long remained fluid and variable. In any event, it was al-Ghazali (d. 1111) who, taking intellectual arms against what he saw as the dangers of philosophy, gave a powerful impetus to the forces of orthodoxy.

Al-Ghazali was an astute thinker, and his authorial personality was forceful and vivid. His work was motivated by belief as well as ideology, by a strong conservatism in religion and an intellectual openness to knowledge unconnected with religion, as well as a moderate strain of mysticism. Why he deserves credit above all is in his choice of the weapon. He had sufficient respect for the intellect to recognize that if philosophy were to be undermined intellectually rather than by violence or invective, it had to be attacked philosophically. The only legitimate antidote to philosophy is philosophy. The title of the relevant work, “The Incoherence of the Philosophers,” shows his readiness to appeal to logic in his crusade against the discipline whose foundation is logic.

The propositions which al-Ghazali attacks are, however, specific and narrow. In his attack on them, he betrays his orthodox credentials. In the main, he assails three

axioms of Avicenna, namely that (1) the world has no temporal origins, (2) God's knowledge encompasses universals rather than particulars, and (3) the body does not undergo resurrection.

Over a century later, Averroës, troubled by al-Ghazali's challenge and the succor it might give to militant orthodoxy (something with which Averroës had direct experience in the caliphal court in Cordova), he wrote a rebuttal called "The Incoherence of the Incoherence." In it, Averroës countered al-Ghazali's criticisms as well as the work of Avicenna. The latter, he thought, had made philosophy vulnerable through concessions to religious or theological ideas and to elements from Neoplatonism. Averroës, who looked upon Aristotle as an exemplar in which nature had exhibited "final human perfection," wanted to return philosophy to Aristotle's understanding. He also wanted to draw a clear demarcation between philosophy and religion. Philosophy, he thought, was endangered not just by its enemies but by its over-zealous champions and half-competent dabblers, like the theologians. Such men harmed its cause while confusing ordinary believers in the same breath. In the unprepared mind, philosophy sows doubt and confusion. Theologians who get carried away by its ideas succeed only in muddying the waters. They shake the beliefs of simple people, which are best preserved from half-baked intellectualism, without providing them the alternative joys and consolations of philosophy.

Averroës stoutly defended the axioms which al-Ghazali had attacked as anti-Islamic. He defended God's knowledge of universals rather than particulars, as the latter, he held, did not befit divine majesty. Similarly, he denied individual survival after death, holding that it was the universals – the species – which survived. This bold view is reminiscent of the terms in which many people in secular cultures, unable to believe in traditional notions of afterlife, yet despairing at the notion that death is sheer annihilation, find meaning in living on, in a spiritual sense, in the causes of collectivities of which one might have been a part.

If we call the long debate in which Averroës' work was a closing chapter "the great debate," this is not because it drew wide attention. Even today, the above-mentioned works of al-Ghazali and Averroës remain unreadable by any but specialists. It was nevertheless a highly consequential development for learned thought. It so happened that Averroës' works, while catching the imagination of Latin schoolmen and provoking vigorous debate in European centers, became altogether marginal to Islamic learning. There are those who lament this fact, in the conviction that the Muslim world is the worse for loss of the rationalism of which Averroës was so eminent a representative.

However, the notion that philosophy in the Islamic world ended with Averroës, a notion advanced by Orientalists, especially early ones, has been vigorously contested by scholars aware of the wealth of thought in the "Eastern" stretches of the empire (Iran and beyond). It is to this that we must now briefly turn.

### Alternative Traditions

Henry Corbin was the most prominent among the scholars who took issue with the predominant attention given to the philosophers we have discussed in the above

section. Corbin was a deep student of mystical philosophy, which was alien to the philosophers mentioned above, except, to some extent, Avicenna, although Corbin's full-fledged interpretation of Avicenna as a mystic thinker is open to doubt.

Corbin deserves credit for not only emphasizing the contribution to Islamic thought by speculative thinkers like Suhrawardi, the mystic Ibn-al-Arabi, and Mulla Sadra, but also bringing to light other names and traditions, long ignored, indefensibly, by Orientalists. These included the Gnostic thought of Ismailis and other Shia schools, as well as a whole series of writers in Iran, from Mir Damad (d. ca. 1632) to Hadi Sabzwari (d. ca. 1872). These writers worked in a tradition of thought in which philosophy, theology, mysticism, and elements from orthodox doctrine found eclectic or synthetic expression.

However, Corbin is open to criticism on several fronts. In their enthusiasm for what he and his admirers call "theosophy," by which they mean a tradition of wisdom (*hikma*) as opposed to reason, they tend to give short shrift to the philosophers discussed above (except Avicenna), whose rationalism Corbin seems to find impoverished in comparison to the thrilling secrets of mystical speculation.

Secondly, he has a complete disdain for history. The historical context of thought is, of course, largely a modern discovery. Classical philosophy, too, took truth to be a non-historical or supra-historical entity. But to adopt an unhistorical view in modern times without evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of a historical approach to thought risks promoting an escapist mindset, ignoring (rather than critically addressing) contemporary traditions of knowledge.

Along with this ahistorical approach is an aversion to political philosophy, which in this view is deemed too "mundane" to warrant serious attention. Correspondingly, removed (or freed) from time and space, the theosophical construction of Islamic thought generates a picture of harmony and continuity where the evidence points to vigorous polemic, discontinuities, and mutual criticism, not only between the representatives and adversaries of philosophy, but between one philosopher and another. In holistic views of Islamic philosophy (of which the school of Corbin is not the only example), these differences tend to be acknowledged only in anodyne terms.

One result of this approach, fourthly, is the notion that it encourages, wittingly or unwittingly, a "spiritual" East and a materialist or at best exoteric "West" in Islam. In less careful or more ideological minds, this distinction tends to slide into a polarized view of Islam's quintessentially "spiritual" mind as opposed to the impoverished "materialism" of Western philosophy and science.

Lastly, it may be said that Corbin's interpretation of philosophy is so inclusive as to blur the concept. It is arguable that in a history of "philosophy" which covers practically every school of thought in Islam – Shi'i "prophetic philosophy," Sufism, to cite just two headings (Corbin 1993) – Islamic philosophy becomes little more than the sum total of organized thought in Islam. To be fair, this expansive use of the term is deliberate. In Corbin's school of thought, it is the traditional restriction of philosophy, in which Gnostic and mystical thought, a flourishing aspect of Islamic thought, fails to find a place, that is misguided.

In this introductory chapter it would be inappropriate to take sides on this issue. It is worth the reader's while, however, to be aware of it, and of its large implications for intellectual life as well as society. The crucial question is whether philosophy is a dis-

tinct discipline, and, if so, where its boundaries precisely lie. What, if anything, distinguishes it from myth, poetry, theology, and dogma? Or do these terms beg revision? That this answer has significant ramifications becomes clear when we reflect that if philosophy of religion is to be treated as synonymous with religious philosophy, the tension between philosophy and myth we see in Plato, or the tense harmony between philosophy and religion we see in Averroës, is eliminated in favor of a view in which, among other things, religion takes on a *sui generis* status. Whether this is a good or bad thing is a matter for debate. It is a debate which would need to include, in its consideration, what we might learn from the fate of religion and the course of secularism in late modern history.

At any rate, there is widespread consensus on the place (though not the interpretation) of at least two philosophers in Islamic history who stood outside the tradition culminating in Averroës: Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra. In what follows, we give a brief outline of these as well as other figures or themes rarely included in histories of Islamic philosophy (with the notable exception, of course, of Corbin).

Suhrawardi was a Platonist rather than an Aristotelian. Against the latter, he reasserted Plato's theory of Forms. He drew on many other sources besides, however (from ancient Persia and India, among others, by his own account), and subsumed them into a strikingly original edifice of thought.

A mainstay of his work is his theory of knowledge. Whereas in the peripatetic tradition knowledge was thought to involve an abstraction of forms from perceived objects, Suhrawardi affirmed the unmediated presence of objects of knowledge to the consciousness of the knower. The knowability of not only the objects of the world, but beings or entities we take to be higher, such as God, resides in learning to see, as it were, what is always present or given. Paradoxically, perhaps, Suhrawardi was against metaphysical constructs while fully accepting postulates such as God, angels, and the divine light, which, where they are affirmed, are ascribed to metaphysics. This, however, is a creative paradox rather than an impasse.

The view of knowledge as presence goes hand in hand with an emphasis on particulars rather than universals. Each thing is what it is in its concrete individuality, presenting itself to consciousness, which is self-aware, i.e., knows that it knows. Since the Avicennian concept of existence is universal, Suhrawardi rejected it in favor of an emphasis on essences.

Suhrawardi's philosophy is often called "illuminationist" because of the elaborate hierarchical imagery of lights presented in his system. In this aspect his work is best described as mythopoetic. However, his interest in the themes just mentioned is recognizably philosophical, so that to allow it to be overridden by its mythopoetic content risks making it more mystifying than it is (on this view, see Wallbridge 2005, p. 201).

Suhrawardi's emphasis on essence rather than existence was roundly criticized by Mulla Sadra, who inverted their relation, affirming existence as the fundamental reality. Since there are no fixed things, in his view, and since we encounter different things in the world, Mulla Sadra is obliged to look elsewhere than in essences for the differentiation between things. He attributes this to varying degrees of "intensity" of existence. Interestingly, too, Mulla Sadra sees continual motion, rather than fixity, as the nature of ultimate reality.



More generally, Mulla Sadra's work is unique in the number of traditions within Islam which he seeks to harness into unity. He had the advantage of living at a time when a whole number of traditions in Islam had run their course from inception to maturity. With this went the advantage of a mind which was at once encyclopedic, assimilative, and synthetic. He strove to integrate the Qur'an, the Prophetic traditions, the traditions of Shi'i Imams (being himself a Shi'i), classical philosophy and its Islamic counterpart, Suhrawardi's system, the mystical speculations of Ibn al-Arabi (1165–1240), and, inevitably, though he does not acknowledge it as such, the influence of Ismaili thought. In his person, he had the advantage of a scholastic mind, a religious sensitivity, and mystical experience harnessed together. Precisely because of the multiple streams in his thought, however, it is difficult, if we were to read him in a critical rather than celebratory vein, to place and assess the specifics of his thought. Despite a slow but steady accumulation of research on Mulla Sadra in recent years, therefore, a comprehensive assessment of his work belongs to the future.

In mentioning the influence of Ismaili thought above, we spoke of it as "inevitable." Ismaili thought was a major presence in the Islamic intellectual scene. Officially shunned by orthodox Sunnis as well as Shias, formative in the evolution of Islamic Gnosticism, it had a deeper and wider impact than philosophers, theologians, and mystics seem to have been willing to acknowledge.

"Ismaili" of course is a general term, and it subsumes a whole number of philosophical and literary traditions. Here we must content ourselves with a brief reference to one prominent thinker with a strong interest in Neoplatonic philosophy and in a synthesis of its tenets with those of Shi'i Islam: Nasir-i-Khusraw (d. ca. 1077).

Neoplatonism was one of a number of Hellenistic traditions that had a marked influence on Islamic intellectual life. Its basic scheme was of a hierarchy of beings whose pinnacle is the One (a metaphysical equivalent of the God of religion), followed, in a descending order, by intellect(s), soul, and ultimately matter, which in Plotinus is a realm of darkness. Each element in this chain of being seeks to rise and be assimilated in the element above it. Furthermore, in true Platonic fashion, Neoplatonism saw cosmic hierarchy reflected in the human organism, with the intellect being the highest and the soul an intermediary between it and the body.

Nasir-i-Khusraw's achievement lay in his attempt to integrate this cosmology and anthropology with the figures (the Prophet and the Imams) of Shi'i Islam. What is more important to note is the overall spirit of his work, which was consciously devoted to an integration of philosophy and prophetic religion (in his own words, a "union of the two wisdoms," *jam-al-hikmatayn*).

Nasir-i-Khusraw was disdainful, in equal measure, of religious dogmatism and philosophical irreligion. The words, which summarize his outlook, are worth quoting, as they have a startlingly contemporary ring:

Since those so-called scholars [of Islamic law] have denounced as infidels those who know the science of created things, the seekers after the how and why have become silent. ... The philosopher relegates these so-called scholars to the rank of beasts, and on account of their ignorance despises the religion of Islam; while these so-called scholars declare the



philosopher to be an infidel. As a result, neither true religion nor philosophy remains anymore in this land. (Cited in Hourani 1967)

## Concluding Comment

Islamic philosophy poses especial challenges to its students. Its positive doctrines are highly scholastic, often abstruse. The scholars who dedicate themselves to its study remain a tiny band of specialists, whose passion for its recondite details is apt to strike the general intellectual, let alone layman, as baffling and incomprehensible.

The very enterprise of metaphysics has now fallen into disrepute. This does not affect only an al-Farabi or Avicenna, but, equally, an Aristotle, Aquinas, or Leibniz. Certainly, the cosmological schemes of Hellenistic writers and their heirs, as for example, the hierarchy of cosmic intellects correlated with heavenly spheres, are now as obsolete, in the light of modern science, as the tenets of ancient alchemy or astrology.

It is always possible to steep oneself in pre-modern metaphysics to an extent that one loses sight of the forest for the trees. Here, we have tried to circumvent this danger by remaining alive to the lessons of the enterprise as a whole while giving an indication of its contents.

In the last analysis, Islamic philosophy belongs to the intellectual history of humanity. We have tried to show why treating it as an enclave within Islam is as misguided as treating Islam as a self-contained enclave within the history of human civilization. Although we have not had the scope here to critically analyze the idea of religion, the preceding pages should serve at least to intimate that philosophy of religion, at best a label of convenience, is a rather artificial and narrow category in which to confine the scope of Islamic philosophy. Even the avowedly religious concerns of a Mulla Sadra, let alone Averroës, are ultimately a part of the human endeavor, through the ages and across the world's cultures, to probe the secrets of the universe and discover how human beings might live meaningfully in the world.

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## Part II

# Philosophical Theology and Philosophy of Religion in Western History

# Ancient Philosophical Theology

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## Presocratics

Aristotle's terminology tells us much about how the Presocratics' philosophical project was perceived in the ancient world and probably, therefore, also by the Presocratics themselves. He never calls a Presocratic (that is, a Presocratic philosopher) "theologian," preferring the word "physicist," at least for those among them who agreed that motion is possible (*Physics* I.1.184b25ff). The word "theologian" (or *theologos*) has for him, in fact, a derogatory sense and is often translated "mythologist" (e.g., *Metaphysics* III.4.1000a9, XII.6.1071b27) and includes such figures as Hesiod and the Orphic poets. (He does, however, speak of "first philosophy" or "the science of being *qua* being," which he develops in his own *Metaphysics* as "theology": VI.1.1026a13–32.) The Presocratics who are interested in theology are interested in it in a philosophical way. "Theologians" like Hesiod are not bothered by the implausibility of their gods, says Aristotle – we need not waste our time on them; but philosophers like Empedocles and the Pythagoreans "use the language of proof" and therefore merit our attention (*Metaphysics* III.4.1000a18–20).

Earlier in the present century, the most influential approach to such issues was that of John Burnet, who held that the Presocratics employ terms like "God" (*ho theos*) and "the divine" (*to theion*), which they do often, in a totally non-religious way (Burnet 1920, pp. 14, 80). Werner Jaeger's authoritative Gifford Lectures demonstrated, however, the impossibility of Burnet's thesis. Speaking of Aristotle's association of Anaximander's "the boundless" (*to apeiron*) with "the divine" (*Physics* III.4.203b13–15), Jaeger says, "[t]he phrase 'the Divine,' does not appear merely as one more predicate applied to the first principle; on the contrary, the substantivization of the adjective with the definite article shows rather that this is introduced as an independent concept, essentially religious in character, and now identified with the rational principle, the Boundless" (Jaeger 1947, p. 31).

Still, the Presocratics are for the most part not interested in cultic religion as such. They believe in "God" or "the gods," but this divine element is meant primarily to provide a relatively simple explanation of the order found in the universe (or *kosmos* – which word can mean both "universe" and "order"). The Presocratics are thus "rationalizers" of the divine. The theologians (in Aristotle's sense) are quite happy to

multiply gods as surprising or significant events present themselves; but inventions of this sort do no more than attach names to the events themselves (*Metaphysics* XII.10.1075b26–7). The Presocratic philosophical theologians want to get behind the events to their principles (or *archai*), which, according to their very nature as explanations, need to be different from that which they explain; they need, that is, to be cleaner, less particular. Such an approach bears with it a certain ontological austerity, presupposing as it does that an explanation is better the more diverse the things it explains.

As early as Xenophanes (ca. 565–470 BCE), therefore, we find at least a tendency toward monotheism: “One god, greatest among gods and men, in no way similar to mortals either in body or in thought” (Diels and Kranz 1951, 21B23; see also Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* I.5.986b21–5, who, however, criticizes Xenophanes for lack of clarity). Xenophanes comes out against the anthropomorphism of Homer and Hesiod, who “attributed to the gods everything that is a shame and a reproach among men, stealing and committing adultery and deceiving each other” (21B11). This leads him to posit a god who is the cause of all: “Always he remains in the same place, moving not at all; nor is it fitting for him to go to different places at different times” (21B26), “but without toil he shakes all things by the thought of his mind” (21B25). We see, however, even in the fragments here quoted (especially 21B23: “greatest among gods”), that this god who causes all things is not incompatible with the existence of other divine beings – any more than Christian monotheism is incompatible with the existence of angels.

Nor should we presume that Xenophanes’ anti-anthropomorphism implies that his God is impersonal, if “impersonal” is meant to deny God a mind. For, although Xenophanes holds that the one God’s thought is unlike mortal thought (Diels and Kranz 1951, 21B23), he also says that mind (or *nous*) is God’s most important attribute (21B25). This notion is even more prominent in Anaxagoras, whose conception of the first cause as Mind (59B12) becomes very influential in subsequent Greek thought, as we shall see.

Although the greatest of the Presocratics, Parmenides, does not explicitly refer to his monolithic “being” as God or as divine, his notion of this being as utterly independent of contingency – uncreated, imperishable, one, continuous, unchangeable, and perfect (Diels and Kranz 1951, 28Bb8.1–49) – establishes the problematic for subsequent philosophical theology at least until Plotinus. It ought also to be noted that the prologue to Parmenides’ sole work, *On Nature*, is, in effect, an invocation of “the goddess,” who will guide him to the realm of being, otherwise inaccessible to mere mortals. This gives us some indication of how Parmenides regards being. With Parmenides the question becomes not how best to describe the relationship of the originating principle (*archē*), unchanging being, to those things dependent on it, but whether anything besides the *archē* exists at all. To say the least, for Parmenides, all else pales in the face of the transcendent, whatever we are to call it.

## Plato

Like many of the Presocratics, Plato often speaks unfavorably of cultic worship and of the gods of the mythologists. In *Euthyphro*, one of the early Socratic dialogues, he lampoons as “bartering” sacrificial offerings to the gods. In the *Republic* (in which the

Socratic traces are fewer), Plato puts into the mouth of Adeimantus a very persuasive indictment of the gods of Hesiod and Homer, which focuses on their licentiousness and willingness to accept bribes from the unjust. Later in the same book (that is, in book 2), the works of Hesiod and Homer are subjected to censorship in the scheme of the ideal city, and in book 10 poets and other artists are banned from the city on the grounds that they distort reality and pander to human weaknesses.

The general tendency to prefer an image of the divine as less “human” and arbitrary is much in evidence in Plato’s one strictly cosmological work, *Timaeus*. (One needs to be wary when citing *Timaeus*, since Plato explicitly says that he is presenting there a “likely myth” (29d2), but it is unlikely that he would present even as myth something that is very different from his own considered opinion, so we can ignore this complication for the time being.) In *Timaeus*, Plato portrays God as a Divine Craftsman or Demiurge who brings order to formlessness or “the Receptacle” (50d). (Thus, he is not a creator god; but cp. Aristotle, *De Caelo* I.10.280a28–32; and Long and Sedley 1987, 13G1.4.) It is striking that he should use precisely this image of God since Plato was no exalter of craftsmen – they are not even citizens of the ideal city of the *Republic*. The point of the image is to insist that God’s activity is rule-governed and rational, like the activity of a craftsman who creates products according to set procedures and models.

The type of rationality that the Demiurge brings to the universe is mathematical: the four elements are actually, in their indiscernible deeper structure, geometrical figures. Fire is pyramidal, earth cubical, air octahedral, and water icosahedral. Each of the geometrical figures is resolvable into right triangles, which allows the elements to change into each other. Or at least three of them can do so – air, fire, and water – which are all resolvable into scalene right triangles. Earth, whose cubes are resolvable only into isosceles right triangles, resists such intermingling. Plato appears to have made earth cubical for theoretical reasons and was criticized for this by Aristotle on the grounds that the theory did not correspond to the facts. Aristotle says of the Platonists, “they had predetermined views, and were resolved to bring everything into line with them” (*De Caelo* 360a8–9). Whether Aristotle was being fair to Plato and his schools is questionable; but he is certainly correct in discerning the predominance of theory in the *Timaeus* at the expense of particularity. This is all part of Plato’s project, shared with the Presocratics, of rationalizing the divine. “For while Plato’s cosmology makes fulsome acknowledgment of supernatural power in the universe, it does so with a built-in guarantee that such power will never be exercised to disturb the regularities of nature” (Vlastos 1975, p. 61).

Nothing, however, is simple in the study of Plato, and there are passages which pull us in the opposite direction. The most important of these are in the tenth book of *Laws*, where Plato discusses theological issues quite straightforwardly – that is, for the most part, without the use of myth. His spokesman, the Athenian Stranger, is primarily concerned about religious impiety, which, he is sure, undermines the constitution of a city. At the end of the book, he imposes penalties – including the death penalty (908e1) – on the various classes of “atheist.” He disparages the doctrines of certain unnamed physicists who say that the four elements exist “by nature and by chance” (889b1–2). The position attacked is a type of materialistic evolutionism (Solmsen 1942, pp. 137, 145–6), quite within the genius of Presocratic rationalism. The position advocated is teleological and anticipates in places (893bff) Aristotle’s causal argument for the

existence of God in *Physics* VII–VIII. Although here in the *Laws* the Divine Craftsman makes an appearance (under the cloak of myth – 903b1–2), God is depicted primarily as the World Soul (896a5–b1; also *Phaedrus* 244c5–246a2; but cp. *Laws* 12.967d6–7), even more intimately bound up in the universe than in *Timaeus*. This close relationship in either case is also in deliberate contrast to Anaxagoras’ Mind, criticized at *Phaedo* 98cd for not being sufficiently involved in the universe. Plato also mounts in *Laws* X a defense of the idea – called into question, for instance, in Euripides (see Plutarch, *Moralia* 464A) – that the gods concern themselves with the details of personal lives.

Is there a way to reconcile these two strands of Platonic doctrine, the one depicting a “rational,” the other a more “interventionist” God? There is, by taking into consideration the way in which Plato argues for the latter. In *Laws* X Plato argues that for the gods *not* to concern themselves with the details of personal lives would be incompatible with their nature. If human craftsmen know to attend to the details of their own business, so much more do the gods, who “being good, possess every virtue proper to themselves for care of all things” (900d1–2). Once this point is established, it is an easy thing to justify cultic practices, provided they do not involve the gods in things incompatible with their divine nature, such as injustice (905d8–906d6). In this way, the gods’ concern for mankind becomes part of their very rationalization or intelligibility. Arguments of this type based on God’s natural characteristics will, of course, come to play a huge role in subsequent philosophical theology. The most important of the characteristics isolated by Plato is God’s goodness (see, for example, *Timaeus* 29e1–3; *Phaedrus* 247a4–7; *Republic* II.381b1–5.382e8–11). With that established, he is free philosophically to argue also that we ought all to seek likeness to God (*homoiōsis theōi* – *Theaetetus* 176b1–3), a sort of divine intervention in reverse.

## Aristotle

Aristotle’s philosophical theology has much in common with Plato’s. His teleological approach to physics and cosmology is similarly incompatible with the materialistic evolutionism that Plato criticizes in *Laws* X (see *Physics* VIII.1 and *Metaphysics* I.8.988b22–8); and he favors a demythologizing of theology (*Metaphysics* XII.8.1074a38–b14; *Politics* I.2.1252b26–7) without denying that the lower gods exist (*Metaphysics* XII.8).

He also suggests in a number of places that he is not entirely opposed to the idea of God as the World Soul (although he has no time for a Divine Craftsman). For instance, in *Metaphysics* XII.8, at the end of his explanation of how the unmoved mover works through the planets and stars, influencing also human events (1074a25–31), he says that the ancients had an inkling of this – i.e., that the heavenly bodies “are divine and that the divine embraces the whole of nature” (1074b2–3). In *Metaphysics* XII (especially 7 and 9), he identifies God, “a living being” (1072b29), with *nous* (mind), a component of course also of the human soul (see also *Metaphysics* XII.9.1075a6–10 and *De Anima* III.5). And in *Nicomachean Ethics* X.8, he uses, as the basis of an argument that philosophical contemplation is the highest vocation, the idea that the gods care for human affairs (1179a24–5). So, although it appears that Aristotle never



speaks of God as the World Soul (see, however, Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* V.66.4), he is certainly in favor of a God who is intimately bound up in the world.

In *Physics* VIII.5, however, he also speaks favorably of Anaxagoras' Mind in so far as it is "impassive and unmixed [with the world]" (256b24–7; cp. *Metaphysics* I.4.985a18). The former word especially ("impassive" or *apathēs*) turns up in a number of other passages crucial to the present consideration (e.g., *Metaphysics* XII.7.1073a11; *De Anima* III.5.430a24, I.4.408b27–31), so we can be sure that Aristotle's praise of Anaxagoras is no stray remark. How can Aristotle have held both that God is immanent and also "impassive and unmixed?" Much of his argument depends on an analogy drawn from geometry. Just as the primary locus of power and influence in a rotating sphere is its central axis, which, although it moves (transitively) the other parts of the sphere, remains quite still, so also the unmoved mover remains majestically impassive even while being the very source of the activity of the universe (*Physics* VIII.9.265b7–8; see also *Movement of Animals* III). Aristotle combines this idea of immanent power with the idea that God is a final cause, such as are "the object of desire and the object of thought" since they "move but are not moved" (*Metaphysics* XII.7.1072a26–7). The end result is a conception of God as both an impelling force within the universe and an object of desire drawing man beyond it.

Aristotle also speaks of the unmoved mover as "thought thinking itself" (*Metaphysics* XII.9.1074b33–5; see also *Eudemian Ethics* VII.12.1245b16–19) and has been criticized for thereby positing a self-absorbed, distant God. But this is quite irreconcilable with his overall theory and should be resisted as a possible interpretation. Aristotle rejects the notion that God might think of something other than himself precisely because this would be to diminish his power (*Metaphysics* XII.9.1074b34). The power that Aristotle is concerned about is the power whereby God has an effect in the world (*Metaphysics* XII.6.1071b12–32). (In *Physics* VIII.5, Aristotle also says of Anaxagoras' Mind that "it could only cause motion the way it does being unmoved, and it can only rule being unmixed" – 256b26–7; emphasis added.) So, we must conceive of God's thoughts about himself as bound up with his immanency (*Metaphysics* I.2.983a8–10, III.4.1000b3–6). Aristotle offers an explanation of how this works: just as our (internal) intentions are their external objects less their matter, so God thinks himself in the things that depend on him (*Metaphysics* XII.9.1047b38–a5; also *De Anima* III.5.430a19–20). The interpretation of Thomas Aquinas would appear then to be correct, that it is precisely in thinking of himself that God knows – and controls – all other things (in *Metaphysics* sections 2614–16).

## Hellenistic and Later Philosophy

Two new major schools of thought arise in Athens shortly after the death of Aristotle in 322 BCE: Stoicism, founded by Zeno of Citium in about 300, and Epicureanism, founded by Epicurus in about 307. Varieties of skepticism are also important during this time and after, some of the most important philosophical skeptics setting themselves up in Plato's own Academy. Platonism also gives rise to Middle Platonism and then Neoplatonism, which itself went through a number of phases and is hardly

identifiable as a “school” due to its often syncretistic nature and the true originality of some of its major figures – notably Plotinus (CE 205–70). From the Aristotelian Lyceum emerge a number of philosophers called Peripatetics, the last of whom was Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. early 3rd century CE). It is impossible in the present context to treat at all adequately such a vast and complicated philosophical legacy as followed the classical period. A few comments about Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Plotinus and how these relate to ideas already discussed will have to suffice.

The God of Stoicism is an immortal and rational animal, perfectly blessed, good, and provident (Long and Sedley 1987, 54A, 54K). The Stoics hold that these and other characteristics of God – including, according to Diogenes of Babylon, his existence (54D3) – are self-evident in our “preconceptions” (54K; also pp. 249–53). They provide a number of proofs for God’s existence (54C–E). They are interested in assimilating into their theology the traditional gods of the pantheon, although they insist too that God is not anthropomorphic (54A). (As often occurs in Greek writings, they go back and forth easily between speaking of the divine in the singular and in the plural; see, for example, 54E.) God pervades all the world by bringing reason (*logos*) or cause to shapeless and inert matter (44B–E, 46A–B, 55E); and the traditional gods represent this immanent, active presence of God in the universe (54I). This divine causation, although rational, is not conceived of as Aristotelian final causation since cause, according to the Stoics, is simply “that because of which” and is associated with bodies (55A–C). God in fact is bodily (46H), the “designing fire” or rational “seed” that pervades the universe (46A1, B2). Accordingly, God does not stand apart as a craftsman planning; what plan there is resides in the causal structure of the world. Sometimes God is referred to as the World Soul (44C, 46E, 46F). Divine providence is evident in this teleologically ordered world (54H); another name for providence is “fate” – meaning, however, “not the ‘fate’ of superstition, but that of physics” (55L, also 54U). (The Stoic conception of fate, however, is an extremely complex subject.) One lives virtuously by living in accordance with reason, which is to live in accordance with divine causation (60H4, 63C).

Epicureanism explicitly contests a number of Platonic and Stoic ideas. Notably, as part of a general anti-teleologism (Long and Sedley 1987, 13E, F5), it rejects both the notion of a Divine Craftsman (13F4, G2) and the notion of a reasonable nature to which we might conform ourselves (13E, 13I, 13J, 21F2). It does not explicitly consider Aristotelian teleology, Alexander of Aphrodisias suggesting that it simply neglects Aristotle in this respect (13J2). Epicureanism is not atheistic, encouraging even worship of the gods (23D, E5, I) who are of human form (23E6); but the worshipper is not to expect the gods’ intervention. The two self-evident characteristics of the gods are blessedness and immortality (23E2–3): involvement in a world so full of savage beasts and wailing babies (13F6–7) would tarnish the former (13D3). Long and Sedley argue that Epicurus himself was an atheist – at least in the sense that the gods were for him merely psychological projections of man’s ethical ideas (vol. 1, pp. 147–9); but this theory founders on Epicurus’ statement that the gods are immortal (23B1; see also 23B2, E2, 54J5). Epicureanism also puts forward a type of materialistic evolutionism (13E, 13I, 15J1–2) very much like that which Plato rejects in *Laws* X.

Plotinus’ attitude toward traditional pagan religion is ambivalent if not hostile (*Life* 10.35–6; but see *Enneads* III.5.2–3). For him God is the ineffable One, below whom are

ranged divine Mind (which is not just “a god” but divinity in its entirety – *Enneads* V.5.3.1–3) and Soul. The One is simple, different from all that comes after it; it exists by itself, unmixed with the beings that depend on it, capable nonetheless of being present, in its own way, in all beings (*Enneads* V.4.1.5–10). Mind, on the other hand, is complex (*Enneads* V.4.2, 6.6) insofar as, in thinking of itself (as in Aristotle), it thinks of the Platonic Forms and functions thereby as Craftsman (*Enneads* V.9.3, 5). Soul has direct contact with the material world: it is in fact a World Soul (*Enneads* IV.8.1–3, V.9.14). The causal relationship of the One (also called the Good) to the rest of the universe is, as in Aristotle, one of attraction and finality (*Enneads* VI.7.16–20, 42). Mind exists insofar as it contemplates the One; Soul exists in so far as it looks to the Forms in the Mind; nature, which is not really separate from Soul, produces the world by a sort of accident, due to its orientation toward the divine and its distance from it. Plotinus compares nature to a weak contemplator who eventually resorts to a physical device in order to understand (*Enneads* III.8.4). His last words were, “Seek to lead the god in you up to the divine in the universe” (*Life* 2.26–7).

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# The Christian Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology

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Medieval philosophy in Europe and the Mediterranean world is shaped by the confluence of two traditions: the ancient Greek philosophical tradition and the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. Christianity is the single most important extra-philosophical contributor to medieval philosophy. Indeed it would be no exaggeration to say that from the time of Augustine (CE 354–430) until the rise of Renaissance humanism in the fourteenth century, philosophy in those areas is dominated by Christianity. Christianity's influence on medieval philosophy comes both from within philosophy itself and from outside it. On the one hand, Christian texts and doctrine provide rich subject matter for philosophical reflection, and the nature and central claims of Christianity force its reflective adherents to work out a systematic account of reality and to deal explicitly and theoretically with deep issues about the aims and methods of the philosophical enterprise. In these ways Christianity is taken up into philosophy, adding to its content and altering its structure and methods. On the other hand, Christianity imposes external constraints on medieval philosophy. At various times these constraints take institutional form: the official proscription of texts, condemnation of philosophical positions, and censure of individuals. Institutional constraints of this sort are manifestations of a more general, sometimes latent hostility toward philosophy that is deeply rooted in the Christian tradition.

## Christianity's Influence on the Aims and Methods of Medieval Philosophy

It is natural that early intellectual converts to Christianity, many of whom were philosophers prior to their conversions, should have been led to think reflectively about the Christian faith not only by their own curiosity but also by the need to defend the new religion before other intellectuals and to spread its message to them. Apologists and evangelists alike needed philosophical resources to perform their tasks, and they helped themselves to philosophical ideas and devices that were ready to hand. But it is unlikely that Christianity could have so thoroughly permeated medieval philosophy were it not for the explicit theoretical rapprochement provided by Augustine.

Christianity placed three significant obstacles in the path of the development of Christian philosophy in the Middle Ages. First, philosophy, and in particular the pagan philosophy of late antiquity, offered accounts of the nature of reality and human beings' place in it that conflicted with the Christian account in important ways. Pagan philosophy, therefore, not only competed with Christianity for converts but also threatened to subvert Christianity from the inside, tempting Christian thinkers who used its methods and resources into error and heresy. Second, philosophy claimed to have arrived at the truth by human reason alone, eschewing (and in some cases openly despising) reliance on the authority of special persons or sacred texts, authority of just the sort that is essential to Christianity. Third, by virtue of its intellectualist methods philosophy appealed to and promised to benefit only the intellectual elite of the late ancient world, in contrast to Christianity, which claimed to bring salvation to all. According to Christianity, God's salvation comes to all people, by faith rather than intellectual achievement, through persons and events attested to in a sacred text, and in accordance with a plan that is unintelligible to those who are wise in this world. These features of the relation between Christianity and philosophy ground a kind of Christian anti-intellectualism that is expressed early and famously in Christian history by Tertullian (ca. CE 160–230), who excoriated philosophy in the name of the gospel.

Augustine articulated a theoretical basis for Christian philosophy that was to undermine Christian anti-intellectualism and undergird the huge edifice of medieval Christian philosophical theology. He assigned priority to the revealed truths that are expressed in Christian doctrine and known through the Bible. With respect to the *content* of pagan philosophy, revealed truth serves as the kind of rule the Christian philosopher uses to measure philosophical claims and arguments. With revealed truth in hand the Christian philosopher is in a position to salvage what is true and useful in pagan philosophy while repudiating what is false. With respect to philosophical *method* – the use of human reason – revealed truth serves as a kind of starting point and guide. The Christian philosopher starts by *believing* revealed truth and seeks, by the use of reason and with God's help, to acquire *understanding* of what he formerly merely believed. Augustine argues that when philosophical reflection begins from revealed truth and seeks to understand, it will strengthen Christianity while avoiding the dangers identified by the Christian anti-intellectualists. Moreover, he argues not only that it is legitimate and useful to bring philosophical method to bear on Christianity, but that doing so is a Christian's positive duty insofar as he or she is able. Reason is created by God and is that in virtue of which human beings are most like God. To repudiate reason, then, would be to despise God's image in human beings.

Augustine's position is based on a distinction between the epistemic propositional attitudes *belief* and *understanding*. To believe a given proposition *p* is to assent to *p* on the basis of authority. To understand *p* is to assent to it on the basis of reason, by virtue of seeing for oneself the reason for its truth. For example, at the beginning of *De Libero Arbitrio*, book 2, Augustine and his interlocutor claim to believe on the basis of authority that God exists – because it is attested by historical accounts reliably handed down through the Church and in the Bible. But they go on in that book to seek understanding of the proposition that God exists: Augustine constructs a rational proof that manifests God's existence and explains God's place in reality. This Augustinian distinction and the Augustinian method of belief seeking understanding are taken for granted by the



vast majority of Christian philosophers in the Middle Ages, including Anselm (1033–1109), who tells us that the original title of his *Proslogion* (the work containing his famous ontological argument; see Chapter 42, Ontological Arguments) was “Faith Seeking Understanding” (*fides quaerens intellectum*).

Later medieval philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), who conceives of theological inquiry primarily as conforming to the model of an Aristotelian science, nevertheless makes room for the Augustinian method within his system. Acknowledging that certain matters of faith – such as the belief that God is triune – cannot be established by human reason and must be accepted on authority, Aquinas claims that there is still important philosophical work to be done with respect to those matters. He calls work of that sort *clarification*, and he takes it to involve the analysis of concepts and doctrines central to Christianity, the investigation of Christianity’s internal coherence and external consistency, the drawing of explanatory conceptual connections, and the development of illuminating analogies. When he describes this sort of enterprise near the beginning of a lengthy discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity, Aquinas seems clearly to have in mind and to be advocating the sort of philosophical project he knew from Augustine’s *De Trinitate* (*Summa Theologiae* Ia.32.1, ad2).

## Christianity’s Influence on the Content of Medieval Philosophy

In articulating a rationale and method for Christian philosophy Augustine clears the way for medieval philosophers to bring philosophical tools and skills to bear on Christianity. Moreover, his writings provide a wealth of rich and compelling examples of philosophical reflection on topics ranging from the nature of sin to the nature of the Trinity. Boethius (ca. 480–524) stands with Augustine in this respect as an important model for medieval philosophical theologians. He composed several short theological treatises, two of which (*De Trinitate* and *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium*) consciously attempt to bring the tools of Aristotelian logic to bear on issues associated with doctrines central to the Christian creed, namely the Trinity and the two natures of Christ (see Chapter 82, Philosophical Reflection on Revelation and Scripture). The sort of philosophical theology prominent in these writings of Augustine and Boethius and in similar works by philosophically minded patristic and late antique writers – namely the discussion of specifically Christian topics by means of rigorous philosophical analysis and argumentation – constitutes a substantial part of the philosophical heritage of medieval philosophy.

It is no surprise, then, that medieval philosophers should take up, develop, and extend the enterprise of philosophical theology. Much of Anselm’s work, including *Cur Deus Homo*, *De Casu Diaboli*, and *De Conceptu Virginali et de Peccato Originali*, falls squarely in this tradition, as does Peter Abelard’s (1079–1142) *Theologia Summi Boni*, Hugh of St Victor’s (1096–1141) *De Sacramentis*, the commentaries on Boethius’ theological treatises by Thierry of Chartres (d. 1154) and Gilbert of Poitiers (1085–1154), and Richard of St Victor’s (d. 1173) *De Trinitate*. It would be a mistake to think of these treatises as theological in a narrow sense that distinguishes theology sharply from philosophy. As their titles suggest, they deal explicitly and primarily with topics in Christian theology, but the sorts of questions they raise and attempt to illuminate and



the kinds of analysis and argumentation they employ are in many cases paradigmatically philosophical. They exemplify the way in which Christianity and philosophical method merge to constitute medieval philosophical theology.

With the emergence of academic faculties of theology in the new European schools and universities of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, theology becomes the paramount academic discipline in a formal curriculum of higher education. The academic study of theology presupposed advanced formal training in philosophy and its main component, apart from the study of the Bible, was the study of theological texts and issues drawn from the Church Fathers and Doctors and from early medieval philosophical theologians. By the mid-thirteenth century, Peter Lombard's *Sentences* (composed ca. 1158) had become the standard textbook for the study of theology. The *Sentences* is a systematic topical presentation of Christian doctrine rich in quotation and paraphrase from authoritative theological sources and heavily weighted toward Augustine. It consists of four books devoted, respectively, to the Trinity, creation (see Chapter 37, Creation and Conservation), the Incarnation, and the sacraments. Since most of the greatest philosophical theologians from the period 1240–1350 (including Albert the Great [d. 1280], Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure [1221–74], John Duns Scotus [1265/66–1308], and William of Ockham [d. 1349]) studied and wrote commentaries on the *Sentences* as the final stage of their formal training, Lombard's text to a significant extent provides the framework within which Christian philosophical theology was to develop in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. During these years the vast majority of the best minds in the Latin West and those with the highest level of philosophical training and sophistication were devoting the major part of their intellectual attention to philosophical theology.

Christianity's influence on medieval philosophy extends beyond the addition of specifically Christian ideas and doctrines such as Trinity, Incarnation, and atonement (see Chapter 73, Atonement, Justification, and Sanctification) to the subject matter of philosophical investigation. Medieval philosophers' reflections on Christianity also affected their philosophical work on non-theological topics. This sort of influence takes several different forms. In some cases, medieval philosophers modify or extend a philosophical theory in order to adapt it to or make it adequate for a Christian understanding of reality. Aquinas, for example, takes over the basic structure of Aristotle's ethical theory but in doing so molds it to the shape of Christianity. He elaborates in an explicitly theological direction Aristotle's claims (in *Nicomachean Ethics* X) about the life of *theoria* being the best life for a human being; according to Aquinas, intellectual vision of the divine essence in the next life is a human being's supernatural ultimate end. Moreover, in order to enable human beings to attain that end, Aquinas argues, God infuses them supernaturally with certain theological virtues – including faith, hope, and charity – over and above the acquired moral and intellectual virtues identified by Aristotle. These infused virtues are modeled on and play a role in the economy of redemption and salvation analogous to that played by the Aristotelian virtues in the attainment of *eudaimonia*. Like his modified Aristotelian moral philosophy, Aquinas' theory of knowledge reflects the conviction that a complete theory must extend to all of reality. Accordingly, he develops a unified epistemology that explains the nature, mechanisms, and scope not only of ordinary human cognition but also of angelic and divine cognition and the cognition characteristic of humans before their fall (see Chapter 72, Sin and Original

Sin) and after their union with God in the next life (see Chapter 74, Resurrection, Heaven, and Hell).

In other cases, important developments in medieval philosophy are motivated or guided by concerns about theological issues even when those developments themselves have no theological component. For example, Henry of Ghent's (d. 1293) development of a sophisticated argument for rejecting one of the central principles of Aristotelian natural philosophy – Aristotle's denial of the possibility of instantaneous change – is motivated by his perception that the Aristotelian principle is incompatible with the correct understanding of the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary. (He believes that the only acceptable account of the immaculate conception requires that Mary undergo an instantaneous change at the moment of her conception from being stained by original sin to being cleansed of it.) Henry intends the results of his anti-Aristotelian argument to have theological applications, but he defends them exclusively on grounds appropriate to natural philosophy and takes them to be compelling quite apart from whatever theological applications they may have. In similar fashion, the Christian doctrine of the creation of the universe in time generates a large and sophisticated body of literature in the later Middle Ages surrounding the issue of whether the universe does (or must) have a temporal beginning. Despite having been occasioned by theological concerns, that literature focuses largely on non-theological questions about the nature of time, change, and infinity.

## Christianity as an External Constraint on Medieval Philosophy

Christianity permeates medieval philosophy, giving rise to philosophical reflection on specifically theological matters, occasioning the extension of philosophical theory in new directions, and spurring philosophical investigation of a broad range of basic issues in metaphysics, epistemology, natural philosophy, and ethics. In many of these ways Christianity is a source of energy and movement in medieval philosophy. But Christianity sometimes motivated efforts aimed at retarding the development of the philosophical enterprise in the Middle Ages. Religiously or theologically motivated resistance to philosophy in general and to the use of philosophical tools and methods for understanding Christianity in particular emerges in different forms throughout the period.

Virulent, institutionally supported forms of resistance appear at three particular times in the later Middle Ages, apparently in reaction to major philosophical trends. The first appears in the first half of the twelfth century when the recovery of what became known as the new logic (including Aristotle's *Analytics*, *Topics*, and *Sophistical Refutations*) and activities associated with the growing schools at Paris focused attention on and invigorated the study of dialectic and the application of its methods to theological problems. Influential clerics, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) prominent among them, saw these developments as a threat to Christianity, leading to heresy and the corruption of doctrine. Attempting to use ecclesiastical authority as a means of suppression, they brought charges against leading philosophical theologians such as Peter Abelard and Gilbert of Poitiers. In the former case Bernard succeeded in obtaining the condemnation of Abelard's Trinitarian views in 1141 and Abelard was forbidden to teach.

The late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century recovery of large portions of the Aristotelian corpus of natural philosophy, metaphysics, and ethics, together with associated philosophical texts by Muslim philosophers such as Avicenna and Averroës, prompted a second period of sustained ecclesiastical reaction to new philosophical developments (see Chapter 10, *The Islamic Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology*). In this case the reaction was motivated not only by a general worry about the harm the new methods and interests might do to theology but also by the fact that the new philosophical material explicitly and directly contradicted the teachings of Christianity. Aristotle had argued in the *Physics* that the universe is beginningless, contradicting the Christian view that it has existed for a finite length of time. Moreover, Averroës' development of themes from Aristotle's *De Anima* contradicted the Christian view of the human soul, its relation to God, and the possibility of personal immortal life (see Chapter 74, *Resurrection, Heaven, and Hell*). In 1210 and again in 1215 ecclesiastical authorities issued edicts proscribing the teaching of Aristotle's natural philosophy at the University of Paris. In 1231 the ban was reaffirmed by the pope, who appointed a commission to examine the works of natural philosophy and purge them of error. The commission seems never to have discharged its task and the ban was eventually forgotten (by the 1250s the entire Aristotelian corpus, including the books of natural philosophy, was part of the curriculum at Paris). It is important, however, not to exaggerate the influence of the proscriptions of 1210 and 1215. Their authority extended only to Paris and not to Oxford or other major European universities, and it seems to have affected only formal teaching at Paris. We have evidence in the writings of important philosophical theologians at Paris during this time that the proscribed works of Aristotle were being read and used.

A similar ecclesiastical reaction occurs in the 1270s, this time largely in response to the radical Averroistic interpreters of Aristotle's philosophy. In 1277 Etienne Tempier, bishop of Paris, issued a condemnation of 219 articles covering a wide range of theological and philosophical topics. The condemnation seems to have been in force at Paris throughout the fourteenth century. It condemns, among other things, the view that the universe is beginningless, that God creates out of necessity, and that there is a single intellect for all human beings. But among its most significant features is the condemnation of views that suggest in various ways that God's power is circumscribed or limited by principles of natural philosophy – for example, that God cannot move the world rectilinearly since a vacuum would thereby be created. The general force of these condemnations is to affirm God's power to do anything that does not involve a contradiction – God's so-called “absolute power.” Regardless of whether the principles of natural philosophy permit the existence of a vacuum, God's acting in such a way that a vacuum is created seems to involve no contradiction, and so is possible by God's absolute power (see Chapter 27, *Omnipotence*). Affirming God's absolute power no doubt seemed to the bishop of Paris the appropriate way to remind overzealous philosophers of the deepest truths about reality already possessed through revelation. References by fourteenth-century writers to the condemnation of 1277 suggest that it was to a significant extent successful in silencing the views it targeted.

The condemnation's emphasis on God's absolute power highlights a broadly logical notion of possibility, distinguishing that notion from a notion of what we might call natural or physical possibility. As a result, the principle that God can do whatever does

not involve a contradiction becomes an important tool of philosophical analysis and criticism. On the one hand, asking whether a certain proposed analysis or hypothetical state of affairs involves a contradiction (or is the sort of thing God could bring about by his absolute power) leads to interesting and useful investigation and thought experiment. On the other hand, pointing out that God could bring about a certain result by his absolute power becomes an effective refutation of philosophical claims and analyses. This is an important tool in William of Ockham's critical arsenal. He allows, for example, that as far as *natural* causes are concerned intuitive cognition can be caused or preserved only by an existing object of cognition. He denies, however, that an intuitive cognition unqualifiedly requires the existence of its object, for God's producing an intuitive cognition where there is no object of cognition involves no contradiction. Similarly, Ockham denies the metaphysical doctrine that essence and existence are really distinct on the grounds that if they were, then (contrary to fact) no contradiction would be involved in God's preserving a thing's essence in the world without the thing's existence, and vice versa. In this way, the condemnation of 1277 – itself a kind of external constraint on medieval philosophy – provides late medieval philosophers with new tools and new direction and is thereby taken up into the philosophy of the fourteenth century.

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## The Islamic Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology

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If we wish to gain perspective on the medieval world of reflection we must replace our Eurocentric image with that of a Mediterranean basin, with a great deal of commerce across this interior sea, commerce that includes warfare and hostilities, as well as scholars who profit from the consequent exchange. We must also remind ourselves that if the basin was partitioned into Muslim and Christian sectors, then Christian communities continued to function (and sometimes even thrive) within the Islamic world, while Jews were tolerated in both, often serving as intermediaries. So while the spirit of this basin could hardly be described as “ecumenical” in current terms, for religious differences seemed always to trump commonalities, the convictions they shared become evident to readers today across the debates which those differences engendered. For Jews, Christians, and Muslims avow the free creation of the universe – that is, all-that-is – by the one God whose action in doing so epitomizes graciousness (see Chapter 37, Creation and Conservation). That is a startling avowal at any time, yet these traditions had to make it in the early medieval period in the face of a picture of the universe and its origins that was seamless and quite intellectually satisfying. So the story of Islamic contributions to medieval philosophical theology will largely recount the ways in which a common Hellenic heritage was challenged to accommodate so startling a faith-assertion as that of free creation. As a matter of historical record, the sharp debates within the Muslim context were not that well known to their Christian interlocutors, but the initial recasting of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina (Avicenna) certainly were – as “Theology of Aristotle” and “*Liber de causis*,” and the ways in which Christian thinkers adapted those schemes make a fascinating tale. Again, for the historical record, Ibn Rushd (Averroës) made far more impact among thinkers in the West (Jewish as well as Christian) than he did in the Islamic world, largely as a result of al-Ghazali’s polemical treatise on “deconstructing the philosophers” (*Tahafut al-Falasifa*). Yet al-Ghazali’s role in the story can now be told more sympathetically than it has in the past, for many of his objections were also registered by Western thinkers, albeit in a less contentious key (Adamson and Taylor 2005).



## Initial Islamic Forays into Philosophical Theology – “the Philosophers”

When Islam entered the sophisticated world of the Byzantine empire, the works of Plato and Aristotle were made available to them by virtue of Syriac translators from Greek into Arabic (Walzer 1962). Of the works of Plato it was the *Republic* which offered a model for the role of reason in the formation of a new society, and al-Farabi (875–950) articulated that model in his groundbreaking essay on the “ideas of the inhabitants of the virtuous city” (Walzer 1985). In that work of distinctly Neoplatonic cast the One is deemed to emanate all-that-is according to an order perfect in conception, an order to be emulated by those responsible for ordering the perfect society. A distinctively Islamic note was struck when the author insisted that those responsible will be required to be prophets as well as philosophers, since the proper place in the divine ordering needs to be able to be communicated to each person in the society, and few of them will be able to follow the pattern of deductive reasoning which comprises the original emanation. It is the Qur’an, after all, which offers the paradigm of a text divinely revealed and hence impeccably wise, yet cast in a language accessible to all, replete with images and examples. None but prophets are able so to order metaphor and image as to communicate the results of philosophical reasoning, however. Indeed, it is Muhammad who offers the paradigm for a responsible and wise ruler.

It was Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, however, which offered the paradigm for doing philosophy to al-Farabi’s successor, Ibn Sina (Avicenna, 980–1037). In his *al-Shifa*, he adapted the cosmological scheme of al-Farabi, whereby the planetary spheres transmit the primary causal influence of the One successively to the earth (Avicenna 2005; Wisnovsky 2003). So this One provides far more than Aristotle’s prime mover, for in the spirit of Plotinus and of Proclus, the movement from unity to multiplicity is at once one of logic and of vitality: what is communicated is a participation in what the One possesses by nature, existence and all that flows from it. What Avicenna added to al-Farabi was an all-important distinction between the ordering and the activity which suffused it. Things are what they are by virtue of their inherent natures; their actual existence they owe directly to the One as the source of all activity. This distinction between *what* something is and the *fact* that it is had been suggested in Aristotle but was never exploited by the Greeks. Its presence in a thinker as preoccupied with essences as Ibn Sina leads one to ask why he deemed it so central to his effort to articulate the movement from the One to the many. The most plausible response is to see it as a philosophical residue of the Qur’anic teaching that the universe was freely created by the one God. It is little more than a residue, however, since the entire process of emanation flows ineluctably from the One; yet the metaphor stands nonetheless, and is exploited by Thomas Aquinas as the keystone in his attempt to articulate “the distinction” of the creator from creation.

God alone, as both al-Farabi and Ibn Sina had averred, is understood to be the One whose very nature is to exist; everything else must have existence bestowed upon it by the One to whom everything that is traces its origination. In this way the distinction of *essence* from *existence* offered Ibn Sina a handy way of articulating what he had already recognized to be the fundamental division in being: between that One which



exists of itself, and everything else which may or may not exist. Aristotle had defined contingency in terms of some things being able to be other than they are; Ibn Sina found a yet deeper understanding: everything other than the One source of all might never have been at all! By focusing in this fashion on *existing* as something which “comes to” an essence, he was able in one formula to distinguish necessary from contingent beings, as well as to limit necessary being to the One, so offering a philosophical analog to the Qur’an’s insistence that all-that-is derives from a single creator. Furthermore, the formula that God is that very one whose essence is to exist provides a formulation of “necessary being” which corresponds to the deeper understanding of contingency just noted. It is this formulation which Aquinas exploits to offer a way of uniquely characterizing God as well as signaling “the distinction” of creatures from the creator (*Summa Theologiae* I.3.4). So we may signal the distinction which Ibn Sina remarked as the primary contribution of Islamic thought to medieval philosophical theology. His unfortunate identification of *existing* as an “accident,” however, following the etymology of the Arabic (and Latin) expression of its “coming to the essence,” left him vulnerable to the trenchant critique of Ibn Rushd, in his *Tahafut al-Falasifa*. It also betrayed his own predilection for essences, a tendency which Aquinas sought to correct in his early opusculum, *On Being and Essence*, by reshaping the basic categorical structure of *being*, as received from Aristotle, to make *existing* the activity most reflective of creation, and so to place essences in potency to this creative influence of God (Burrell 1986).

### Averroës’ Return to Aristotle and al-Ghazali’s Critique of these Initiatives

Both al-Farabi and Ibn Sina had based their speculation on a work transmitted as the “Theology of Aristotle,” but which in fact represented an Islamic adaptation of the *Enneads* of Plotinus (Adamson 2003). This happenstance allowed them to bring these two classical thinkers into closer rapport than the texts proper to each would have permitted, but the results offended two later Islamic thinkers, Averroës (Ibn Rushd) and al-Ghazali, though for very different reasons. Ibn Rushd resented the way in which Aristotle’s pristine reasoning had been transmuted into a quasi-mystical ascent to the One, thereby pre-empting something of the proper role of the Qur’an as well as injecting foreign elements into the philosophy associated with the “master of those who know” (Dante). Indeed, Averroës can easily be read as one convinced that Aristotle exhibited the paradigm of human reasoning, so that attempts to know the truth will succeed only in the measure that they follow his teaching and resolve according to his proper methods. For al-Ghazali, on the other hand, Ibn Sina’s teaching offended against the received doctrine of the Qur’an, notably in its conclusions regarding the necessary emanation of the universe from the One (God), as well as its Neoplatonic insistence on the immortality of the soul to the exclusion of bodily resurrection (Gardet 1951).

Averroës’ celebrated response to al-Ghazali’s objections to “the philosophers” exhibits both sets of objections: al-Ghazali’s refutation of the inherited emanation scheme as an adequate formulation of “the distinction” of creator from creatures, as well as Averroës’ dual response to al-Ghazali and to Ibn Sina. Entitled *Tahafut al-Tahafut* (or

"Deconstruction of the Deconstruction"), Averroës' text contains the body of the original work by al-Ghazali which he sets out to refute: *Tahafut al-falasifa*, or "Deconstruction of the Philosophers" (Van den Bergh 1954). The results of this exchange, however, far exceeded the reasoning proper to the respective texts. Al-Ghazali was perceived to have the better of the debate in the Muslim intellectual world, with the result that Averroës virtually disappeared from their map, and while a select band of Western thinkers did not hesitate to identify themselves as "Averroists," the subsequent work of al-Ghazali never crossed the linguistic barrier to become accessible to Western medievals (Van Steenberghen 1977; Vajda 1960). In fact, the only work of his which was known to them was a purported introduction to the *Tahafut*, separately published as the *Maqasid al-falasifa* (or "Aims of the Philosophers"), where he surveyed the systems of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina so sympathetically that Western medievals identified him as one of them, as one of the *falasifa*.

So it can fairly be said that this debate in the Islamic world had very little direct resonance in the West, although the concerns of the three faith traditions which avowed the free creation of the universe intersected in various ways. The most central of these had to do with the manner in which one could amend philosophic reason as transmitted to the faith traditions of the early Middle Ages to accommodate divine freedom, especially when the Plotinian emanation scheme presented itself as the most elegant alternative to philosophers, though it seemed to exclude origination as an intentional act (Burrell 1986; Gerson 1990). To mention divine freedom, however, immediately raises the question of human freedom as well: an issue which preoccupied Islamic thought early on, as it would bring Christian theology to a deadlock much later in the *de auxiliis* controversy. The Islamic controversy is telling for its methodological implications, even though Western medievals were not party to its specific terms. The Qur'an left an equivocal legacy respecting the relation between divine and human freedom: on the one hand, the response to God's call must be a free one, susceptible to praise or blame; on the other, God's sovereignty is complete. The initial response to this dilemma turned on a decidedly univocal meaning for "act," namely "originate," which made God and human beings competitors for the origination of human actions.

Given that initial univocal understanding of *acting* as *creating*, the argumentation is direct and emphatic: human beings and *not* God must be the cause of human actions, especially since God can never be convicted of performing evil actions. This school became known as Mutazilite, and our best source is the *al-Mughni* of 'Abd al-Jabbar (d. 978) (Frank 1982; Burrell 1993). Their understanding of human freedom as autonomy, however, coupled as it was with their univocal notion of *agency*, effectively removed the entire domain of human acts from the creator's sovereignty. Such a move could not long be compatible with an Islam which emphasized Allah as Lord. So it was a Mutazilite thinker, al-Ashari (d. 935), who began the search for an alternative rendering of the agency proper to human freedom. That teaching, which was dubbed Asharite and soon became the accepted strategy among Muslim theologians, held that "God creates the act while human beings *acquire* it"; in other words, "the act is the act of God in so far as God creates it [*halaqahu*] and is the act of a human being in so far as one acquires it [*iktisabahu*]" (Gimaret 1980). This notion of *appropriation*, carried by the Qur'anic terms *kasb* and *iktisab*, attempts to introduce a contrast term to "create" and so break the prevailing univocal understanding of "act" which identified "acting" with

“creating,” yet the history of its use has never satisfactorily clarified that contrast. Richard Frank proposes to translate *kasb/iktisab* as “performance,” which offers a fascinating optic on the earlier discussion (Frank 1983; Gimaret 1990).

What we may discern, however, is the way this controversy seeks to articulate what defies clarification: the “distinction” of creator from creatures (Sokolowski 1982). It is that very relationship which becomes dramatized in the interaction of divine with human freedom, and so is perhaps better understood in the doing than in the attempt to articulate it. Such is at least the mature position of al-Ghazali in his magnum opus, *Ihya Ulum ad-Din*. Yet articulating coherently the relation of primary to secondary causality in the context of a created universe will have to await subsequent Islamic thinkers like Suhrawardi, Ibn al-Arabi, and Mulla Sadra (Suhrawardi 1999; Chittick 1998; Rizvi 2007; Burrell 2007). It is worth contrasting this tortuous path with Aquinas’ deft observation that while “the very meaning of voluntary activity denotes an internal principle within the subject, this ... does not have to be the utterly first principle, moving yet unmoved by all else. The proximate principle is internal, but the ultimately first moving principle is external, as indeed it is for natural movement, this being the cause setting nature in motion” (*Summa Theologiae* I–II.9.4.1).

### The Lasting Contribution of Islamic Thought to Philosophical Theology

Philosophical theology inevitably walks a tightrope between two sets of criteria: those belonging to rational inquiry as such, and those inherited from a faith tradition. Yet reflection on the exchange between Islamic and Western thinkers in the medieval context may help us see that this way of putting the question, rather than posing a dilemma, offers that fruitful tension which should animate any sustained inquiry. For as we engage in rational inquiry, we always find ourselves reasoning from presuppositions held in various ways and reflecting dimensions of our personal and communal history not fully open to scrutiny. In short, all inquiry is “tradition-directed.” Traditions which last must themselves be open to criticism from within, a large part of which will itself be directed to clarifying unexamined presumptions or exploring cultural accretions to ongoing inquiry. So the key to a fruitful philosophical theology will lie in the manner in which its practitioners execute this maneuver of reconciling the twin criteria of faith and of reason, continually examining each set for internal consistency. Islamic thought has held tenaciously to the premise that the universe is freely created and continuously sustained by a sovereign God. The Asharite response to the Mutazilite formulation of the structure of human freedom and the relation between our freedom and the creator’s effectively illustrated this penchant in Islamic thought.

Yet it is fair to say that philosophical theology still needs a coherent account of primary and secondary causality in a created universe. What is required is a set of philosophical tools which can be shaped and adapted to do the work, once one acknowledges the presence of a creator of everything that is. And while Islamic thought struggled to craft those tools, it never shirked from presenting us with the challenge to do so. That challenge may be its most telling contribution to the current enterprise of philosophical theology. Even if the task can be seen *a priori* to be an impossible one,

given the intractability of “the distinction” of creator from creatures, it must nonetheless be undertaken, for that is the nature of philosophical theology: to attempt to formulate what we know must escape formulation. At least such is the task of philosophical theology as seen from the vantage point of one accustomed to the acute reasoning and astute formulations of medieval thought, be it Jewish, Christian, or Muslim (see Chapter 9, *The Christian Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology*; and Chapter 11, *The Jewish Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology*). For these thinkers, beginning as they all did with the postulation of a universe freely created, were forced to find a way of articulating divinity which assured its uniqueness, and then a manner of conceiving the universe so related to that divinity as to depend upon it in everything. It is fair to say that philosophy of religion in its Western Christian form has not always observed those strictures, so that difficult issues attending the relation of primary to secondary causality have often simply been ignored. Perhaps one of the fruits of the inescapably interfaith context of our life and inquiry today will be to recall Western thinkers to the intellectual exigencies of faith in “one God, creator of heaven and earth.” If so, the contribution of Islam to the discussion will prove telling, as this brief sketch of the history has tried to show.

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# The Jewish Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology

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## Introduction

The fundamental problem of Jewish philosophy, like that of Islamic and Christian philosophy, is summed up in the formula “faith and reason.” Arising as an effort toward harmonizing the tenets of Judaism with philosophic teachings that held sway at successive periods of Jewish history, medieval Jewish philosophy dealt with problems in which there seemed to be a conflict between philosophical speculation (*iyyun*) and acceptance of dogmas of the Judaic faith (*emunah*). The goal of the Jewish philosopher was not so much to buttress faith with understanding, but rather to reconcile two distinct bodies of knowledge. In this article we shall examine the attempts of Maimonides (1135–1204) and Gersonides (1288–1344) to reconcile the strictures of faith and reason in the context of the following issues: the doctrine of creation, negative theology, and doctrines of divine omniscience. Before turning to these topics, however, let us examine briefly the underlying theological epistemology employed by both thinkers.

## The Nature of Belief in Jewish Thought

Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* is the most important work of medieval Jewish philosophy and exercised a profound influence upon all subsequent Jewish thought, as well as upon Christian scholasticism (see Chapter 9, The Christian Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology; and Chapter 23, The Jewish Tradition).

However, the ostensibly orthodox views espoused in the *Guide of the Perplexed* are not necessarily Maimonides’ own. He characterizes belief (*emunah*) as follows: “belief is the affirmation that what has been represented is outside the mind just as it has been represented in the mind” (*Guide* 1.50, p. 111). But how is the reader to approach beliefs espoused in the *Guide*? In the introduction Maimonides distinguishes two levels of interpretation, exoteric and esoteric, and suggests that it is sometimes incumbent upon a philosopher to conceal his own esoteric position behind the veil of exoteric doctrine: “For my purpose is that the truths be glimpsed and then again be concealed, so as not to oppose that divine purpose which one cannot possibly oppose and which has concealed from the vulgar among the people those truths especially requisite for His



apprehension" (*Guide*, pp. 6–7). Maimonides further describes seven sorts of contradictions commonly found in philosophical works and suggests that two of these (numbers 5 and 7) may be used specifically to conceal potentially controversial or even heretical doctrines from the masses. The seventh is the most important for our purposes, and is used, Maimonides notes, when "speaking about very obscure matters ... to conceal some parts and to disclose others. ... In such cases the vulgar must in no way be aware of the contradiction; the author accordingly uses some device to conceal it by all means" (p. 18). He then states that any contradictions found in the *Guide* itself are intentional (p. 20). In light of these cautionary comments, generations of scholars have devoted their lives to unpacking the underlying esoteric meaning of the *Guide*.

Perhaps unwisely, Gersonides did not create around his works such an aura of intrigue and his philosophical corpus was largely ignored until the present century. Writing in fourteenth-century France, Gersonides spent several years in the papal court in Avignon, and may at that time have come into contact with the views of William of Ockham and those of other fourteenth-century scholastics. His major work, *The Wars of the Lord*, is a sustained examination of the major philosophical issues of the day. In his introduction to *Wars* Gersonides emphasizes that he will not adopt esotericism in his own work. While he is sensitive to the problem in revealing philosophical theories to a traditional audience, he does not resort to obfuscation. Suggesting that those who "increase obscurity either because of poor organization or opacity of language, so that the easy becomes difficult, defeat the purpose for which they have written their books" (*Wars*, p. 100), he proclaims his intention to use clear, straightforward language, and to avoid obscurity (p. 101).

But is reason the final arbiter for Gersonides? In the introduction to *Wars*, he stressed that "if the literal sense of the Torah differs from reason, it is necessary to interpret those passages in accordance with the demands of reason" (p. 98). However, in other passages Gersonides appears to acknowledge the supremacy of scripture over reason. For example, in *Wars* volume 1, chapter 14, he suggests that "adherence to reason is not permitted if it contradicts religious faith. This is incumbent upon all the faithful; ... if there appears to be a problem concerning which our view differs from the accepted view of religion, philosophy should be abandoned and religion followed" (p. 226). Recent scholars have disagreed over how to read Gersonides on this issue. Following Eisen's recent argument, let us suggest that Gersonides be read politically: for individuals who have not progressed philosophically, it is better that *they* remain committed to religious faith and ignore the philosophical doctrines of *Wars*. Concerned not to disrupt the beliefs of the traditionalists, Gersonides politely suggests that they desist from reading his work. Unlike Maimonides, however, he does not resort to esotericism to hide his intentions.

## Divine Attributes

Do the different attributes of God constitute many distinct aspects or persons in the divine essence? Jewish philosophers were divided on this question, as were medieval thinkers in general. Saadyah Gaon, a tenth-century Jewish philosopher whose works reflected the influence of the Islamic Mutazila (see Chapter 10, The Islamic Contribution



to Medieval Philosophical Theology), followed the tradition of Philo and the *kalam* thinkers in denying multiplicity to God: the three attributes of life, power, and wisdom are implied in the very notion of God. It is due to the deficiency of human language that they cannot be expressed in one single term.

Maimonides' theory of divine predication followed the Neoplatonic tradition and was built primarily upon al-Farabi's and Avicenna's distinction between essence and existence; this distinction implied that in the case of contingent beings existence was accidental to essence, whereas in God essence and existence were one (see Chapter 31, Simplicity). Hence God's nature is totally unlike ours, and terms used to describe God must be used either in a homonymous way or as negative predicates. The four essential attributes of God – life, power, wisdom, and will – are of one simple essence; all other attributes are to be conceived either as descriptive of divine action, or as negative attributes. However, even these four attributes, when predicated of God, are used in a homonymous, or equivocal, sense (*Guide* 1.56, p. 131). The difference between human and divine predicates is qualitative; since the terms are applied by way of perfect homonymy, they admit of no comparison between God and God's creatures.

Gersonides, on the other hand, disagreed with Maimonides' celebrated theory of negative theology and sided with Averroës, who, rejecting the Avicennian distinction between essence and existence, argued that existence is not an accident of Being. In following Averroës, Gersonides paves the way for a positive theology which permits of positive attributive ascription. Gersonides disagrees with Maimonides, claiming that divine predicates are to be understood as *pros hen* equivocals, or derivative equivocals, rather than absolute equivocals (as Maimonides had argued). That is, according to Gersonides, predicates applied to God represent the prime instance or meaning of the term, whereas human predicates are derivative or inferior instances. So, for example, knowledge when applied to God is perfect knowledge and constitutes the standard for human knowledge, which is less perfect than divine knowledge (*Wars* III.4107–15). The implications of this discussion will become apparent when we turn shortly to the predicate of divine omniscience.

## Creation

The problem of creation is a good example of the attempted synthesis between philosophy and Jewish tenets (see Chapter 37, Creation and Conservation). Working within a framework which upheld the infinity of time, Aristotle posited an eternal universe which had no temporal beginning. Jewish thinkers as far back as Philo had already grappled with reconciling this framework with the biblical account of creation. Saadyah, for example, argued that both Platonic and Aristotelian theories of eternity and uncreatedness of the universe are incompatible with the Jewish view of creation *ex nihilo* (from nothing). After examining and rejecting the current philosophical views of creation, he stressed the philosophical significance of the biblical viewpoint. Gersonides and Maimonides are equally committed to a cosmology in which the deity willed the universe to exist. Unwilling to reject Aristotle's ontology of time altogether, both philosophers posit a resolution which can be construed as a version of eternal creation.

It is in the topic of creation that Maimonides' esotericism is most cogently revealed, warning as he does that the dangers of expounding upon creation are intimated in the introduction, where he asserts that this topic must not be taught even to one individual. In *Guide* Maimonides summarizes what he considers to be the three standard views on creation as the scriptural, Platonic, and Aristotelian views (II.13). The main elements of each theory, as depicted by Maimonides, can be summarized briefly as follows:

- 1 The scriptural view: that the universe was brought into existence by God after "having been purely and absolutely non-existent"; through his will and his volition, God brought into "existence out of nothing all the beings as they are, time itself being one of the created things" (II.13, p. 281).
- 2 The Platonic view: that inasmuch as even God cannot create matter and form out of absolute non-existence, there "exists a certain matter that is eternal as the deity is eternal ... He is the cause of its existence ... and that He creates in it whatever He wishes" (II.13, p. 283).
- 3 The Aristotelian view: agrees with (2) in that matter cannot be created from absolute non-existence, but concludes that the heaven is not subject to generation/corruption; that "time and motion are perpetual and everlasting and not subject to generation and passing-away" (II.13, p. 284).

Which of these three views is espoused by Maimonides himself? Ostensibly, at least, Maimonides supports (1). Having dismissed (2) as a weaker version of (3), he argues that (1) is no more flawed than is (3). Then, pointing to the possibility of (1), coupled with its Mosaic (and Abrahamic) sanction, Maimonides argues that the very plausibility of (1) suggests the non-necessity of (3). Why does Maimonides not accept (2)? The main reason, as he tells us, is that the Platonic view has not been demonstrated (II.25, p. 329).

If we take Maimonides at his word, then, it is clear that (1), creation in time of the universe out of absolute non-existence, is his view. If, however, we are inclined to take seriously his original demarcation between an exoteric and esoteric reading of controversial issues, then it is tempting to dismiss his espousal of (1) as an exoteric position and to search for the underlying, or concealed, interpretation, which is Maimonides' real view of creation. And as commentators working through the text have demonstrated, there is certainly ample evidence to support either (2) or (3) as his esoteric view. In fact, there is so much conflicting evidence, all of which can be supported with plausible argument, that recent scholars have suggested that ultimately Maimonides upheld a skeptical stance in light of the evidence and did not take to heart any of the three positions. Although such a skeptical view would not be quite as heretical as espousing either (2) or (3), it still constitutes a provisional rejection of (1), which is tantamount to a rejection of the Mosaic theory.

Gersonides' discussion of time and creation is contained primarily in *Milhamot* VI.1. Like Maimonides, he is concerned with whether time is finite or infinite, as well as with whether the creation of the world can be said to have occurred at an instant. In order to uphold the finitude of time, Gersonides refutes the Aristotelian arguments by

attempting to demonstrate that time must have been generated. He argues that just as quantity is finite, so too is time, since time is contained in the category of quantity (*Milhamot* VI.1.10, pp. 329ff).

Having posited that the world was created at an initial instant of time by a freely willing agent, Gersonides must decide whether the world was engendered out of absolute nothing or out of a pre-existent matter. Arguing that creation out of nothing is incompatible with the facts of physical reality, he adopts a Platonic model of matter drawn ultimately from the *Timaeus* (see Chapter 8, Ancient Philosophical Theology). The opening verses of Genesis 1 are used to distinguish two types of material reality: *geshem* and *homer rishon* (*Milhamot* VII, ch. 17, pp. 267–71). In *Milhamot* (V.2, ch. 2, pp. 193–4) Gersonides argues that this formless matter accounts for various astronomical phenomena. Totally devoid of form, *geshem* is the primordial matter out of which the universe was created. Since it is not informed, it is not capable of motion or rest; and since it is characterized by negation, *geshem* is inert and chaotic (*Milhamot* VI.1, ch. 17, pp. 367–8; 374). This primordial matter is identified with the “primeval waters” described in Genesis 1:2 (*tohu, tehom, and mayim*). However, Gersonides points out that *geshem* does not itself exemplify absolute non-being, but rather is an intermediary between being and non-being (*Milhamot* VI.1, ch. 18, p. 372).

In contrast to *geshem*, *homer rishon* is the second type of reality. It is understood in the Aristotelian sense as a substratum which is allied to form. *Homer rishon*, or matter, is inferior to form and hence cannot be known in itself. It contains within itself the potentiality to receive forms, yet has no actuality of its own (*Milhamot* VI.1, ch. 17, p. 367). Inasmuch as it does not contain its own actuality, *homer rishon* is not an ontologically independent entity. Rather, Gersonides is wont to refer to it as “the matter that does not keep its shape” (*Milhamot* V.2, ch. 1; VI.6, pt. 2, ch. 4). In *Milhamot* (VI, pt. 2, ch. 7), Gersonides compares this matter to darkness, for just as darkness is the absence of light, so too this matter represents the absence of form or shape. For Gersonides, therefore, creation means that the plurality of forms contained in God is released and imparted to the *prima materia*, the substratum of being. In this way he upholds creation in time, but sacrifices creation *ex nihilo*.

## Divine Providence

We turn now to one of the most intractable problems in medieval Jewish thought, namely that of divine omniscience (see Chapter 28, Omniscience). Medieval philosophers, concerned with safeguarding the freedom of human action, worried whether God’s foreknowledge of future contingent events entailed the necessary occurrence of these events. That the force of God’s knowledge need not be causal was already claimed by Saadyah Gaon. In answer to the apparent paradox that God’s foreknowledge necessitates the objects of his knowledge, Saadyah’s response is that “he who makes this assertion has no proof that the knowledge of the Creator concerning things is the cause of their existence” (1948, p. 186). What concerned medieval philosophers in general, and Jewish philosophers in particular, was the fact that if God is infallible, then the objects of his knowledge *can not fail to be* what God already knows them to be. How to account for the ability of humans to contravene the prior infallible knowledge which

God has of their actions became of paramount importance to Maimonides, Gersonides, and later Jewish philosophers.

Under what conditions does God know unactualized particulars? Maimonides emphasizes that the term knowledge is predicated equivocally of God and humans, maintaining that God is in no way affected by what he knows. God remains one even though his objects constitute a plurality, and he remains unchanged even though the objects of his knowledge are mutable (see Chapter 38, Immutability and Impassibility). These points are reflected in two brief assertions: first, that God's knowledge does not contain plurality, and second, that God cannot acquire at a certain time knowledge he did not possess previously. Since the divine knowledge is *a priori*, it is not affected by the ontological status of objects which result from this knowledge. Hence Maimonides argues that since the objects of God's knowledge do not causally act upon his knowledge, his essence is unaffected by their multiplicity. The second claim, that God's knowledge is unaffected by any change in its objects, is supported in the context of a distinction between absolute and relative non-existence. Absolute non-existence is never an object of God's knowledge (*Guide* III.20, p. 480). Relative non-existents, or future contingents, are possible objects of God's knowledge. It is not impossible, Maimonides claims, that God's knowledge has as its object those "non-existent things about whose being brought into existence we knew beforehand" (*Guide* III.20, p. 481). Like Averroës, Maimonides asserts that God's knowledge of future possibles does not change their nature; neither is his nature altered by a change in the objects of his knowledge.

Gersonides is the only Jewish philosopher, with the exception of Ibn Daud, who presented a tentative indeterminist theory, to uphold a form of indeterminism as a solution to the paradox of divine omniscience. Although intimated in a number of texts, this position is developed most fully in treatise 3 of *Wars*, wherein he develops his main argument that an omniscient, immutable deity cannot know changing particulars. The underlying premise in this argument is that all future particular objects are in fact mutable; that is, they change from a state of non-existence to one of existence. Gersonides claims that an immutable deity cannot be omniscient, if omniscience entails knowing objects which undergo change. But does it follow from God's knowing a future contingent that it is necessary? In contradistinction to Maimonides, who claims that God's knowledge does not render the objects of his knowledge necessary, Gersonides will want to maintain that divine foreknowledge and contingency are incompatible.

Arguing that divine omniscience severely compromises the contingency of the objects of God's knowledge, Gersonides dismisses Maimonides' form of compatibilism. Having rejected Maimonides' attempts to harmonize foreknowledge and contingency, and having upheld the existence of contingency in the universe, Gersonides adopts the one option left to him, namely that God does not know future contingents. According to Gersonides, God knows that certain states of affairs may or may not be actualized. But insofar as they are contingent states, he does not know which of the two alternatives will in fact be actualized. For if God did know future contingents prior to their actualization, there could be no contingency in the world (*Wars* III.4, pp. 116ff). Echoing Ibn Daud, Gersonides claims that God's inability to foreknow future contingents is not a defect in his knowledge (*Wars* III.4, pp. 235–6).

In this fashion, Gersonides concludes, the problem of divine omniscience has been resolved in favor of indeterminism. With respect to future contingents, God knows their

ordered nature or essence, and knows that they are contingent, but God does not know which alternative will become actualized. But has Gersonides in fact solved the problem of divine omniscience? Despite his admonition to the contrary, I have argued in other works that ultimately Gersonides' theory of divine omniscience does not fully account for other theological concerns, for example prophecy (Rudavsky 1985).

## Conclusion

We have seen that Jewish philosophy arises out of a clash of two worldviews: the tenets of Jewish faith and belief on the one hand, and the strictures of philosophy on the other. This clash permeated much of Jewish philosophical debate in the Middle Ages. With respect to method, we have seen that Maimonides adopts an esoteric method in order to safeguard the philosophically unsophisticated masses from the potentially threatening implications of philosophical truth; Gersonides, on the other hand, eschews esotericism in favor of leading the masses gradually toward a more sophisticated level of philosophical understanding. Both philosophers agree that philosophical truths can harm the untrained, traditionally-rooted reader, and both believe that reason and faith are mutually complementary. But Gersonides disagrees with Maimonides over the method to be employed, believing that the masses can ultimately be taught. Discussions pertaining to divine predication, creation, and divine omniscience have reflected this tension as well. In short, both Maimonides and Gersonides reflect the medieval Jewish attempt to reconcile traditional Jewish beliefs with what they feel are the strongest points in Greek philosophy, be it Plato, Aristotle, or Neoplatonism; although a synthesis of these systems is their ultimate goal, the strictures of philosophy often win out at the expense of theology.

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## Early Modern Philosophical Theology on the Continent

DERK PEREBOOM

The legacy of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophical theology is very substantial. Descartes' contributions include a reconstruction of Anselm's ontological argument, development of a theology in which radical conceptions of divine power and sovereignty play a central role, and a reworking of Stoic and Augustinian themes in theodicy. Descartes' ontological argument, first presented in the Fifth Meditation, aims to prove the existence of God from the idea of the divine essence alone (Descartes, 1964–76, AT VII 63–71):

1. When I have an idea of an object, whatever characteristics I clearly and distinctly understand the object of the idea to have, it really has. (premise)
  2. I have a clear and distinct idea of God, as the maximally perfect being. (premise)
  3. God has all perfections. (2)
  4. Everlasting existence is a perfection. (premise)
  5. God has everlasting existence. (3, 4)
- 
- C. God exists. (5)

Caterus objects that by similar reasoning one can prove the real existence of the object of my idea of the existent lion (AT VII 99). Gaunilo's reply to Anselm's version is similar: by analogous reasoning one can prove the existence of the maximally perfect island. A second objection, anticipated by Descartes in the Fifth Meditation, is that if we are speaking accurately, predicating a property of something without any conditions presumes that the thing exists. So if "Obama is president of the USA" is true, it follows that Obama exists. "Pegasus is a winged horse" is strictly speaking false, whereas "In the myth, Pegasus is a winged horse" is true. Premise 3 is thus in trouble. Descartes can legitimately claim only something like "In the idea of God, God has all perfections" (or "If God exists, then God has all perfections"). But then all that follows is "In the idea of God, God has existence" (or "If God exists, then he exists"), which falls short of the conclusion Descartes desires. A third problem, raised in the Second Objections, is that the argument is sound only if a most perfect being is possible, or equivalently (in some views), if there is a divine essence (AT VII 127), and this has not been established.



Descartes' reply to the first two objections involves the notion of a true and immutable nature (TIN), a descendent of Plato's notion of a Form (AT VII 101ff.). Descartes maintains that TINs exist in some sense, although they need not be exemplified as really existent things. But the kind of existence TINs have is, on Descartes' view, sufficient to undermine the second objection above: one need not prefix anything like the phrase "In the concept of God" to premise 3 if God is a TIN. One challenge for Descartes is to show that God is a TIN but that the existent lion and the maximally perfect island are not. In the Fifth Meditation Descartes maintains that TINs are different from fictitious objects of ideas in that TINs are independent of the thought of their conceivers. For example, a triangle is a TIN because it has properties that I don't realize it has when I first form the idea of a triangle. God also has this feature – I don't grasp all of the properties of the maximally perfect being when I first form the idea. The most perfect island, however, is also a TIN by this criterion. Later Descartes (AT VII 83–4) characterizes a TIN as having a unity such that it cannot be divided by the intellect. He thinks that having this feature shows that it hasn't been put together by the intellect. Accordingly, an existent lion is not a TIN because I can conceive of a lion that doesn't exist. But it seems that I can also conceive of an omnipotent being lacking maximal benevolence, and so by this standard it appears that God would not be a TIN. To the third problem, concerning the possibility of God, Descartes replies that at least as far as our concepts or ideas are concerned, there is no contradiction in the nature of God, and that the denial that the nature of God is a possible one is on equal footing with the denial that the angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles (AT VII 150–1).

On the divine attributes, Descartes argues that God's perfection entails that God is the *total cause* of everything that happens or exists. This entails that everything that happens, even human decisions and actions, are entirely caused by God (Descartes 1964–76 [1645], AT IV 313–4). In particular, it is the infinitude of divine power that requires God to be the total cause. If, for example, human actions did not depend on God's will, his power would be finite (AT IV 332). In his letter of October 6, 1645, to Princess Elisabeth, Descartes writes:

It seems to me that all the reasons that prove the existence of God, and that he is the first and immutable cause of all the effects that do not depend upon the free decision of men, likewise prove in the same way that he is also the cause of all those that do depend on it. For one could not demonstrate that God exists save by considering him as a being sovereignly perfect; and God could not be sovereignly perfect if something could happen in the world that did not come entirely from him ... philosophy alone suffices to give us the knowledge that the least thought cannot enter the mind of man if God had not wished and willed from all eternity that it enter therein. (AT IV 313–4/Blom p. 162)

For Descartes this conception of divine power also has the consequence that the eternal (necessary) truths are created by God (AT I 135ff; AT I 147ff).

Descartes' theodicy focuses on the problem of intellectual error. How can God be supremely perfect and yet create us with the capacity to make errors in judgment? In his Fourth Meditation reply, Descartes revives the Stoic theory of judgment, in which judgment is a two-stage process. In the first, an idea is presented to the mind, and in the second, the will is engaged, and it has the ability to affirm, deny, or suspend

judgment with respect to the idea. If the idea is affirmed or denied, a judgment is formed. Error is threatened when an idea that is not clear and distinct is affirmed or denied. We can avoid error if we suspend judgment whenever an idea is not clear or distinct. God has given us the capacity to suspend judgment in such situations, and this is indeed what we should do. We err only because we fail to heed this recommendation. A problem arises for this strategy because, as we have seen, Descartes affirms that “the least thought cannot enter the mind of man if God had not wished and willed from all eternity that it enter therein.”

Descartes never presents a sustained defense of how God’s being the total cause is compatible with the freedom of the will adduced in the Fourth Meditation. Sometimes he appears to claim that this compatibility is a mystery. Elsewhere he seems to be entertaining the solution of Luis de Molina (Flint 1998), according to which from eternity God knows what every possible free agent, under any possible circumstance, would freely decide, where the decision is free in the libertarian sense (free only if it is not causally determined by antecedents beyond the agent’s control), and then armed with this knowledge, God directs the universe with precision by creating the free creatures and the circumstances that fit the divine plan (e.g., AT IV 351; Ragland 2005). But he would need to say more to reconcile Molinism with the claim that God is the total cause, since on the Molinist view, God does not causally determine our free decisions.

But even the Molinist view still leaves open why God chose to create beings that he knew would freely make the sorts of moral and intellectual errors that our world features. In response to this sort of concern, Descartes asserts that he “cannot therefore deny that there may in some way be more perfection in the universe as a whole because some of its parts are in error, while others are immune, than there would be if all the parts were alike” (AT VII 63). Descartes advocates a version of the Stoic theodicy that apparent imperfections are required for the good of the whole, and that if one were to take a broader view, one would no longer see reason to believe that if God existed he would be morally imperfect. Leibniz advocates a similar theodicy by claiming that considered as a whole, this is the best of all possible worlds, since it is the “simplest in its hypotheses and the richest in phenomena” (Leibniz 1969 [1686], p. 306).

In his *Ethics* Spinoza introduces a revolutionary conception of God, which is accompanied by a theodicy unavailable to adherents of a more traditional notion. According to Spinoza there is only one substance, and that is God, and there is nothing outside this substance. Accordingly, Spinoza believes that God does not transcend creation, but creation is part of God – a view at odds with traditional Judeo-Christian theology. Another radical view of Spinoza’s is that God has no plans or purposes. This is so, first, for the reason that God’s intellect does not precede his will, and therefore God does not think about what he does before he does it, and second, that if God were to act with an end in view, there would be something he lacks, which is not the case. Instead, everything that happens follows without design or purpose from the divine nature. Furthermore, from the divine perspective, there is nothing in the universe that is bad. We have the habit of calling things good or bad relative to our own needs and wants. But for Spinoza, the perfection of a thing is measured not by the needs and wants of some other being, but by its own nature. Spinoza’s conception of God is a component of a neo-Stoic vision of the universe, according to which we can come to accept with equanimity anything that happens if we identify intellectually with the divine

perspective. We will then understand and accept everything as following necessarily from the divine nature, and we will regard nothing as bad or evil.

Another innovative conception of God's relation to the universe is developed by Berkeley. In his view, physical objects do not exist independently of minds, but consist solely of ideas. The source of these ideas is God, and God produces them in us in accord with lawlike regularities – the laws of nature. God's existence can be demonstrated from the involuntariness of the greater part of our ideas in conjunction with the harmony, regularity, and beauty they display (a teleological argument) (Berkeley (1982) [1710], sect. 146). Since according to Berkeley our ordinary experience is a type of direct divine communication with us, our relationship with God is in this respect especially intimate. As Berkeley frequently remarks, quoting scripture, "in God we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

Among Leibniz's contributions to philosophical theology are his development of the ontological and cosmological arguments, and his introduction of a theistic argument from the existence of eternal truths. He takes on several difficulties for Descartes' ontological argument: first, that the claim that the essence of a most perfect being includes its existence – that existence is a perfection – requires argument; second, that all this argument can demonstrate is the conditional "if God exists, then he exists," and third, that the possibility of a most perfect being needs substantiation (e.g., Leibniz 1969 [1676], pp. 167–8; [1677], pp. 177–80; [1684], pp. 292–3; [1692], p. 386; Adams 1994, pp. 135–56). In several places Leibniz addresses the first of these problems by arguing that by our conception of God we understand a necessary being, and from this it follows that the essence of God involves his existence. In this way one can avoid altogether the premise that existence is a perfection. In some writings Leibniz bypasses the second of these problems by formulating the argument modally. In his view, a successful ontological argument must show that there is such a thing as the essence of God, and this is the same task as showing that God is a possible being. If it can be shown that God is a possible being, one can conclude that there is a divine essence, and because this divine essence involves necessary existence, it will follow that God exists. Such a modal argument might be formulated in this way:

1. If there is a divine essence, then the divine essence involves necessary existence (premise).
  2. If God is a possible being, then there is a divine essence (premise).
  3. If God is a possible being, then the divine essence involves necessary existence (1, 2).
  4. If God is a possible being, then God necessarily exists (3).
- 
- C. If God is a possible being, then God actually exists (4).

What has yet to be demonstrated, then, is that God is a possible being. Leibniz offers several types of argument for this premise. One sort relies on the cosmological argument, according to which only a necessary God could provide a satisfactory explanation for the existence of the aggregate of all the contingent beings. So on the assumption that these contingent beings possibly exist, it must be possible for a necessary God to exist. A second type of argument for God's possibility returns to the thesis that God is the most perfect being, and adds that perfections are positive and simple, unanalyzable

qualities. In outline, Leibniz's reasoning has the following form. Consider any proposition of the form "A and B are incompatible," where A and B are any two perfections. Two properties are incompatible only if they are logically incompatible. Thus "A and B are incompatible" will be true only if one of these perfections turns out to be the negation of the other, as in *omniscient* and *non-omniscient*, or if their analyses revealed simpler properties, one of which is a negation of another. But since all the perfections are positive and simple and thus unanalyzable, this cannot be the case. Consequently, "A and B are incompatible" will be false, "A and B are compatible" will be true, and a being with all perfections will be possible (Adams 1994, pp. 142–8).

Leibniz's argument from the eternal truths involves the premises that truths must be true in virtue of something distinct from them, and that certain propositions would be necessarily true even if there were no finite minds. It follows that these necessary truths could not be true in virtue of facts about human psychology alone. Against the Platonist conception, that these truths are true in virtue of Forms existing outside of any mind whatsoever, Leibniz argues that abstract entities are not the kinds of things that could have mind-independent existence. The contending view that remains is that these truths are true by virtue of the divine nature, in particular, by ideas in God's mind (Leibniz 1969 [1714], p. 647; Adams 1994, pp. 177ff).

Leibniz's cosmological argument aims to demonstrate the existence of God from the need to explain certain facts about the world. For Leibniz the world is the complete aggregate of actual *merely hypothetically necessary* beings, that is, actual beings that are necessary consequent on the existence of some other being(s) (Leibniz 1969 [1697], pp. 486–91), or the complete aggregate of actual *contingent* beings (Leibniz 1969 [1714], p. 646). His cosmological argument overcomes an important objection to earlier versions, since Leibniz's does not assume that the world has a beginning in time. Suppose that in fact the world has no beginning in time, and that each being in the world has an explanation in some previously existing being(s). Then two demands for explanation yet arise: Why is there a world at all rather than none? and: Why does this world exist and not some other world? Neither explanation can be provided on the basis of entities within the world. Leibniz's conclusion is that there must be a being that is not merely hypothetically, but *absolutely* necessary, on the basis of which the requisite explanations can be provided, and whose own explanation is contained within itself. This being is God. (A similar argument is advanced around the same time by Samuel Clarke.)

Hume's endowment to philosophical theology, contained mainly within his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, includes several powerful challenges to the cosmological and teleological arguments. Hume advances three objections to the type of cosmological argument advanced by Leibniz and Clarke (Hume 1980 [1779], part IX). The first is that the notion of (absolutely) necessary existence is problematic. Suppose that if a being is necessary, its nonexistence will be inconceivable. But for any being whose existence we can conceive, we can also conceive of its nonexistence, and thus there couldn't be a necessary being. Hume anticipates the objection that if we genuinely understood the divine nature, we would be unable to conceive God's nonexistence. He replies that an analogous point can be made about matter: perhaps, if we really understood the nature of matter, we would be unable to conceive its nonexistence. And therefore the argument cannot establish that God is the necessary being.

Hume's second objection is that God cannot be the causal explanation for the existence of a series of contingent beings that has no temporal beginning, since the causal relation "implies a priority in time and a beginning of existence." One might reply, with Kant, that we can in some sense conceive of a non-temporal causal relation, and that God, from outside of time, causes a series of contingent beings that has always existed.

The third objection is that in a causal series of contingent beings without a temporal beginning, each being will have a causal explanation by virtue of its predecessors. Since there is no first being, there will be a causal explanation for every contingent being on the basis of previously existing contingent beings. But if each individual contingent being has a causal explanation, the entire series has an explanation. For wholes are nothing over and above their parts: "did I show you the particular causes of each individual in a collection of twenty particles of matter, I should think it very unreasonable should you afterwards ask me what was the cause of the whole twenty" (part IX). Replies to this objection include the claim that even if one has explained in this way the existence of each individual in this contingent series, one still has not answered the questions: Why is there a world at all rather than none? and Why does this world exist and not some other world?

Hume presents an especially elegant version of the teleological argument (part II), which can be formulated as follows:

1. Nature is a great machine, composed of lesser machines, all of which exhibit order (especially adaptation of means to ends). (premise)
2. Machines caused by human minds exhibit order (especially adaptation of means to ends). (premise)
3. Nature resembles machines caused by human minds. (1, 2)
4. If effects resemble each other, their causes do as well. (premise)
5. The cause of nature resembles human minds. (3, 4)
6. Greater effects demand greater causes (causes adequate to the effects). (premise)
7. Nature is much greater than machines caused by human minds. (premise)
8. The cause of nature resembles but is much greater than human minds. (5, 6, 7)
9. The cause of nature is God. (8)

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C. God exists. (9)

Hume's objections to this argument include the claims that the analogies on which it is dependent are not strict, and that there are alternative explanations for order and apparent design in the universe. The contemporary reply to these objections is that the teleological argument should be conceived as an argument to the best explanation, on the model of most scientific arguments. For then the analogy need not be exact, and it will be useful if it helps show that the theistic explanation is indeed the best one. In addition, in this model one can allow alternative explanations, as long as the theistic one is best. Hume, or at least his character, Philo, concedes "that the works of nature bear a great analogy to the productions of art is evident; and according to all the rules of good reasoning, we ought to infer, if we argue at all concerning them, that their causes have a proportional analogy" (part XII). But Philo also affirms that we cannot infer any important similarities between humans and the author of nature beyond

intelligence, and in particular we cannot infer some of the divine attributes that are most important for sustaining traditional theistic religion (part V). Most significantly, given the evil that there is in the universe, we cannot conclude that its designer has the moral qualities traditional religion requires God to have (part X).

One of Hume's most interesting objections to the teleological argument is that it generates an absurd infinite regress (part IV). If order and apparent design in the material universe are explained by divine intelligence, a further demand for explanation is thereby generated. What explains the order and apparent design that give rise to intelligence in the divine mind? By reasoning of the sort employed in the teleological argument, it would have to be a super-divine intelligence. But what explains the order and apparent design that give rise to super-divine intelligence? An absurd infinite regress results, and to avoid it, one might simply suppose the material world to "contain the principle of order within itself." To this Hume has Cleanthes reply that "even in common life, if I assign a cause for any event, is it any objection that I cannot assign the cause of that cause, and answer every new question which may incessantly be started?" In scientific theorizing it is no decisive objection against an explanation that it contains entities that are themselves not adequately explained. Crucial to the value of scientific explanations is that they supply an explanatory advance, and we can reasonably believe that a theory does so without our having in hand adequate explanations for all of the entities it posits.

Among Kant's contributions to philosophical theology are his argument from the existence of God from the need to ground real possibilities, his criticisms of the ontological argument, and his introduction of a moral proof for belief in God. Kant's favored argument for the existence of God in his pre-critical period (before 1780 or so) is based on this conviction that there are real possibilities not grounded in the principle of non-contradiction, but which must nevertheless have a ground (Kant 1992, pp. 107–201; Ak II 63–170 [1763]; Chignell, forthcoming). Kant fully endorsed this argument in his pre-critical period as "the only possible basis for a demonstration of the existence of God." In his critical period (i.e., after 1780 or so), Kant gave up this full endorsement, but he still thought that the reasons it adduces secure theoretical justification for belief (*Glaube*) (Kant 1978 [1830]). Its core idea is that not all possibility can be grounded in God's thinking it and not its negation (an impossibility), which is how Leibniz had proposed that all possibilities are grounded. For there are judgments whose impossibility is not grounded in the law of non-contradiction, but in a non-logical repugnance of features. Kant maintains, for instance, that it is impossible that a material being can be conscious, even though no contradiction is generated by this supposition, only non-logical repugnance (Kant 1992, p. 130; Ak II 85–6; Chignell, forthcoming). Such an impossibility cannot be grounded in divine thought, for God can think any proposition that does not involve a contradiction, and thinking this impossibility does not involve a contradiction. Instead, such real possibilities can only be grounded in a being that exemplifies every set of fundamental properties whose joint exemplification is possible, and that being is God (Chignell, forthcoming).

An alternative is to claim that some possibilities are primitive or ungrounded, and this appears to be an option for Kant in his critical period. A feature of the critical Kant is that he is no longer confident in rationalist principles such as the principle of sufficient reason, according to which every fact has a sufficient explanatory ground.



In particular, Kant comes to believe that the claim that all facts about real possibility have a ground is insufficiently justified to provide a basis for knowledge. Still, Kant's lectures on philosophical theology reveal that in his critical period he still held that the existence of God is the only available ground of these real possibilities, and that this explanatory point justifies belief in the existence of God, but not knowledge (Kant 1978 [1830]).

Kant's most famous criticism of the ontological argument is encapsulated in his claim that "existence" or "existent" is not a real or determining predicate (Kant 1997 [1781/1787], A592/B619ff), that is, "a predicate that is added to the concept of the subject and enlarges it" (A598/B626). Kant's idea is that since "existent" does not enlarge the concept of God, it is not a greater-making predicate. James Van Cleve proposes the following definitions of "enlarges" and "real predicate":

A predicate *P* enlarges a concept *C* =Df it's possible that there exist something that is *C* but not *P*.

A predicate *P* is a real predicate =Df *P* enlarges at least one concept.

(Van Cleve 1999)

"Existent" is not a real predicate on this definition. For any concept *C*, it's not possible that there exist something that is *C* but does not exist. But one might instead define "enlarge" as follows:

A predicate *P* enlarges a concept *C* =Df a possibly existent being is *C* but not *P*.

Some possible beings don't exist, so "existent" would enlarge a concept on this definition. Also, even if "existent" does not in some technical sense enlarge a concept, it still remains open that a being with all perfections but not existence is not as great as a being with all perfections and or including existence.

In addition, Kant's objection can be avoided by the proposal that the perfection at issue is necessary existence, the term for which is a real predicate on either definition, and by then presenting a modal version of the argument. Kant's more telling criticism is that given what we can know, we cannot determine whether God is really a possible being. He grants that the notion of a most perfect being may not involve a logical contradiction, but he argues that this is not enough to show that it is really possible (A602/B630). The implication for the ontological argument is that we cannot know whether it is really possible for certain of the perfections to be jointly exemplified even if we know that this involves no contradiction, "for how can my reason presume to know how the highest realities operate, what effects would arise from them, and what sort of relation all these realities would have to each other?" (Kant 1978 [1830], p. 57).

Central to the theistic argument fully endorsed by Kant in his critical period is the claim that belief that God exists is required for the moral life. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant argues that the end of the moral life is the highest good – that rational beings be virtuous and that they be happy in accord with their virtue (Kant 1993 [1788]; Ak V 106ff). Furthermore, rationality demands that we promote the highest good, and by the principle that *ought* implies *can*, it follows that it is possible for us to bring it about. But there is nothing in the world of experience that makes for a necessary connection between virtue and happiness. We must therefore assume the



existence of a non-empirical being, God, who can bring this connection about. In his *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, Kant no longer argues on the basis of the premise that we ought to promote the highest good (Kant 1960 [1793], pp. 3–7). Rather he claims that, given how human beings are psychologically constituted, we must view our actions as aiming at an end, although this end need not function as a reason for action. So, although for us moral action does not require an end as reason for action, we must have a conception of an end towards which our moral action is directed. This end is the highest good and, for the possibility of the realization of this end, “we must postulate a higher, moral, most holy, and omnipotent being.” Kant also intimates that failure to believe that the highest good is an end that can be realized would constitute “a hindrance to moral decision.” Perhaps he believes that if the virtuous lived miserable lives without any hope of happiness, and if they believed that their efforts could not help realize a moral universe, then a sense of sadness or frustration would undermine their moral motivation. Whether Kant holds that such an argument secures only the rationality of the belief that God exists or that it in addition undergirds a type of knowledge of the existence of God is a difficult matter for interpretation (Kant 1993 [1788]; Ak V 134–6).

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# Early Modern Philosophical Theology in Great Britain

GEOFFREY GORHAM

## Introduction

Philosophical discussions of God in early modern Great Britain evolved in close relation with natural and political philosophy. Just as longstanding scientific and political models were displaced by the new philosophies of Galileo, Descartes, Machiavelli, and Hobbes, the Reformation ended a long period of relative theological consensus in Christian Europe. And in the two centuries of theological innovation and conflict that followed, many of the same issues that preoccupied philosophers, such as human nature, freedom, and the foundations of knowledge, were also at the heart of major debates in science and politics. The result of deep and widespread theological controversy in Great Britain was not so much the transformation of the concept of God – which remained remarkably familiar at the end of the eighteenth century – as the transformation of theology itself. No longer a self-evident creator and sovereign, God had become the ultimate scientific hypothesis: perhaps unavoidable to explain and unify the known phenomena, but still tentative and subject to criticism and refinement.

## Religious Knowledge: Skepticism, Fideism, Reasonableness

As compared with their Continental counterparts, the epistemological orientation of British philosophers and theologians of the early modern period is markedly empiricist, probabilistic, and fallibilist. Although faith and revelation continue to play an important role in religious knowledge, especially for Calvinist and Puritan theologians, British authors are generally dismissive of *a priori* demonstrations of the existence and nature of God. To the extent reason can tell us about God, it is by causal inference from known effects. In a teleological spirit thoroughly rejected by Descartes and Spinoza, Francis Bacon and Robert Boyle promoted the study of nature as an excellent route to religious knowledge. Indeed, it is “‘natural philosophy’” or science to which Bacon refers in his famous quip that “a little philosophy inclineth man’s mind to atheism; but depth in philosophy bringeth men’s minds about to religion” (1663, p. 87). Such knowledge, like scientific knowledge, was partial and tentative, hence the need for faith.

Other authors verge on outright theological skepticism. Thomas Hobbes denies we can learn much at all about God by causal reasoning, other than that he exists. In his dispute with Boyle over the experimental evidence for the vacuum, waged during the English Civil War, he denies that one can ascertain true causes from experimental effects: "there is no effect in nature which the Author of nature cannot bring to pass by more ways than one" (EW vol. 7, p. 88). For the same reason we should be agnostic in theology. Although man is drawn by necessity to posit "some cause, whereof there is no former cause, but is eternall" (EW vol. 3, p. 93), the nature of God is incomprehensible to us: "we understand nothing of *what he is*, but only *that he is*" (EW vol. 3, p. 383). So it is likewise futile to inquire into God by *a priori* reflection on our ideas since, as Hobbes bluntly tells Descartes, "there is no idea of God in us" (CSM vol. 2, p. 127). Agnosticism of this sort is common in the seventeenth century. Pascal's declaration that "If there is a God, he is infinitely incomprehensible" (1952, p. 214) was also affirmed, more cautiously, by Descartes and Margaret Cavendish.

The upheavals of the Reformation, the collapse of the Aristotelian consensus in academic theology, and the rediscovery of Sextus Empiricus provided considerable fodder for religious skepticism in the seventeenth century. One response to such skepticism was radical fideism ("faith-ism"), which flourished especially in French thinkers (both Catholic and Protestant) like Montaigne, Pascal, and Pierre Bayle. In Britain, the Cambridge scholar Joseph Mead found the solution to skepticism in biblical prophecy and millenarianism, interests inherited by his less skeptical students, the Neoplatonists Henry More and Ralph Cudworth. Similarly, the Scottish Catholic John Drury offered prophetic knowledge as superior to Descartes' aprioristic answer to skepticism.

In general, however, the British response to religious uncertainty was more tempered and rationalistic. Friends of Hobbes among the "Great Tew" circle of Oxford, such as William Chillingworth and Lord Clarendon, developed a modest defense of Anglicanism that came to typify academic theology in England through the eighteenth century. Fatigued by incessant factionalism, these "Latitudinarians" hoped to establish a rational, biblically grounded theological consensus, at least among Protestant sects. The view that Protestant Christianity is neither geometrically self-evident, nor reducible to brute faith, but rather eminently "reasonable" (in both epistemic and political terms) is common to Edward Stillingfleet, the Cambridge Platonists, major theological figures of the early Royal Society such as John Wilkins and Boyle, and Locke, whose *Reasonableness of Christianity* exemplifies this attitude. Naturally affiliated with fallibilist theology is religious toleration in the public sphere, which was defended by Latitudinarians like Chillingworth, and famously by Locke in the *Letter concerning Toleration*.

## Atheism and Deism

Besides fideism and rationalism, another response to religious skepticism is, of course, atheism. But although many of the influential expounders of reasonableness endorsed toleration of religious diversity, this toleration did not extend to irreligion. If not unthinkable, atheism was at least unspeakable in Great Britain before the late eighteenth century, subject to both universal social censure and official legal sanction. But atheism was widely suspected and alleged, and must have been judged a "live option"

(in William James' sense) considering the large number of tracts devoted to its refutation, such as Henry More's *Antidote against Atheism* and Walter Charleton's *Darkness of Atheism Dispelled by the Light of Nature*. Hobbes and Spinoza were the usual suspects, though Catholics and the several Protestant sects routinely charged one another with atheism too. Open avowals of atheism begin in the latter half of the eighteenth century, but mainly by Parisian *philosophes* like Denis Diderot and Baron d'Holbach rather than British authors. (When Hume met d'Holbach in Paris, according to Diderot's recounting of the occasion, Hume confessed he'd never met a real atheist before.)

Deism, roughly the view that God at first creates the world and its laws and then withdraws forever, was a much more widely embraced alternative to theism, especially during the eighteenth century and among the educated classes. Typically highly rationalistic, deists reject all forms of revelation, anthropomorphism, and sectarian dogma. The main roots of deism are in Spinozism and the Socinian heresy, which denied miracles, the Trinity, and personal immortality. Although Hobbes comes close, the first systematic English deist is Herbert of Cherbury, who argued that the source of atheism is the promulgation of absurd and incompatible notions of God. Other prominent British deists were Charles Blount, Matthew Tindal, and John Toland. Tindal and Toland were both inspired by the empiricism and fallibilism of Locke. Although Locke certainly accepted the messianic status of Christ, he is sometimes considered a deist owing to his minimalist version of Protestantism, and he was charged with Socinianism in his own time. The Scottish philosopher and economist Adam Smith was sympathetic to deism, but the attitude of his friend and countryman, David Hume, is more complicated. Hume clearly accepted, and in turn influenced, the deist critique of the dogmatic and supernatural aspects of traditional religion. And like the deists he advanced historical explanations of religion. But the thoroughly skeptical tenor of Hume's philosophy seems to undermine the deist aim of providing a rational foundation for religion. Though the victory in *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* is officially awarded to the natural theologian Cleanthes, the work as a whole seems largely aimed at subverting the rationalistic pretensions of Cleanthes' case for religious belief. For Hume religious belief remained at bottom a "continued miracle." At any rate, although deism had a part in the birth of America, through its strong influence on colonial figures like Joseph Priestley, Thomas Paine, and Thomas Jefferson, its heyday ended with the eighteenth century. It was left for Kant to entirely rethink the relation between reason and religious belief.

## Science and Religion

In the wake of the persecutions of Bruno and Galileo, seventeenth-century proponents of the new science were anxious to demonstrate its positive implications for traditional theology. Descartes tells Mersenne that the *Meditations* are intended to supply "the foundation of my physics" but then dedicates the work to the Sorbonne theologians and (misleadingly) advertises it as a demonstration of the immortality of the soul. In Protestant England the promise of a science cleansed of both "pagan" (Aristotelian) and "superstitious" (papal) trappings was a major selling point for natural philosophy. Bacon maintained that "natural philosophy is, after the word of God, at once the

strongest remedy against superstition and the most proven food for faith. Therefore, she has deservedly been granted to religion as her most faithful handmaid; for one manifests the will of God, the other his power" (2000, p. 75). The notion that science gives us direct and objective knowledge of God's skill, just as the Bible does God's intent, without needing the mediation of Aristotle or the Church, is central to Robert Boyle's influential case for the "usefulness" of experimental philosophy: "the knowledge of the works of God proportions our admiration of them, they participating and disclosing so much of the inexhausted perfections of their Author" (1999 vol. 3, p. 235). The metaphor of God as author of the book of nature, ubiquitous in early modern British authors, encouraged the rise of natural theology as an alternative to both revelation and rationalistic philosophy. The argument from design, which receives definitive treatments in Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (1777) and Paley's *Natural Theology* (1802), was already developed in detail by numerous "Christian virtuosi" of the early Royal Society of London, including Boyle, Joseph Glanville, and Robert Hooke (see Chapter 62, Historical Perspectives on Religion and Science).

## Biblical Criticism and the History of Religion

As noted above, Hobbes repudiated the guiding principle of natural theology, that the character of the maker can be inferred from the "book of nature." He also raises doubts about the more literal word of God, the Bible. Though widely suspected of atheism, Hobbes was a pioneer in the field of biblical criticism. With the emergence of mass printing technology, rising literacy, and the Reformation turn from ecclesiastical authority, questions of the Bible's origin and authenticity took on increased urgency. Spinoza and Newton also devoted considerable energies to the historical analysis of biblical texts. Critics approached the texts with various theological aims. But the mounting scrutiny inevitably contributed to skepticism about the scriptural basis for traditional dogma. Thus, Newton found little biblical support for the Trinity, while the influential (or at least widely condemned) Socinian heresy went so far as to deny a scriptural basis for Christ's divinity. Along with the emergence of "objective" biblical research came increasing attention to the history of religion. Some of this historical work was apologetic or revisionist; but beginning with Spinoza, and moving through deists like Matthew Tindal to naturalists like Hume, much was also critical or anthropological in approach: if religion could not be justified, perhaps it could be explained (see Chapter 47, Miracles).

## Materialism and Immaterialism

Hobbes earned a reputation for atheism not so much for his agnosticism about God's nature, or his biblical criticism, but for his unrelenting materialism: "that which is not Body is no part of the Universe; and because the Universe is All, that which is not part of it is Nothing" (EW vol. 3, p. 672). At the inevitable objection that materialism eliminated God, raised for example in correspondence with Bramhall, Hobbes did not flinch in pronouncing God "a most, pure, simple, invisible, Spirit Corporeal" (EW vol.

4, p. 313). Hobbes was not alone in attributing corporeality to God. This is essential to Spinoza's "*deus-sive-natura*" pantheism, for instance. But less radical English thinkers, while not going so far as Spinoza or Hobbes, embraced related doctrines. Locke seems to entertain the logical possibility of "thinking matter" in the case of humans (1975 bk. IV, ch. iii, 6), and may have accepted mortalism (the natural mortality of the soul). Henry More argued, for example in a 1649 exchange with Descartes, that both God and finite minds are spatially extended. But More decisively departs from Descartes (and from Hobbes, Spinoza, and the entire Aristotelian tradition) in denying that extension implies body. An otherwise tireless proponent of Cartesianism in Britain, More could not abide Descartes' absolute exclusion of spirit from the extended world. Without an intrinsic spiritual element ("Spirit of Nature") the Cartesian world was motionless and lifeless, contrary to manifest experience and verging on full-blown materialism and atheism. From similar considerations Berkeley drew a more extreme conclusion: since "upon the same foundation [materialism] have been raised all the impious schemes of Atheism and Irreligion" (1998, p. 136), the only solution was immaterialism. But in this opinion Berkeley was alone, with the exception of the Oxford theologian John Norris, among early modern British thinkers (see Chapter 65, Theism and the Scientific Understanding of the Mind).

## God, Space, and Time

The correspondence between More and Descartes raised a perennial theological puzzle, which in the seventeenth-century context had a major influence on the science of space and time: the nature of God's ubiquity (omnipresence). How can God exert his power somewhere without being located there, and how can he have location without having body? Descartes' answer, known as "nullibism," was the common one: God is nowhere in substance even though is everywhere in power. More rejected nullibism, and eventually also the compromise position "holenmerism": God is located entirely and without parts at every place. The latter doctrine aimed to avoid the implication, which repelled Descartes, that God is divisible. More characterized the extension of God as having real parts that are indivisible ("indiscerpible") and interpenetrable with bodies: "one, simple, immobile, eternal, complete, independent, existing from itself, subsisting by itself, incorruptible, necessary, immense, uncreated, uncircumscribed, incomprehensible, omnipresent, incorporeal, permeating and encompassing everything" (1995, p. 57). So described, God's extension closely resembles and influences the absolute space of More's younger Cambridge colleague and friend, Isaac Newton: an independent, infinite Euclidean "container" for any possible body or motion. And just as More conceived of God spatially, Newton depicted absolute space in divine terms: "He endures always and is present everywhere, and by existing always and everywhere, he constitutes duration and space" (1999, p. 941). As Newton indicates, there is a parallel theological motivation for absolute time – the independent duration of an infinite being – as for absolute space. Considered on the theological side, this decisive positioning of God within space and time is perhaps the most distinctive (and still controversial) development in early modern British philosophical theology. While the traditional non-spatial and atemporal conceptions of God are upheld by most Continental figures, including



Malebranche, Leibniz, and Arnauld, in Great Britain the perspective is different: Charleton, Barrow, Cudworth, Locke, and Clarke, in addition to those already mentioned, all situate God squarely within space and time. Berkeley's idealism takes quite literally Newton's description of space in the *Opticks* as the "sensorium" of God. This disagreement played a major role in the Clarke-Leibniz controversy over absolute vs. relational space and time, whose reverberations are felt in both science and theology to this day. For Newton the matter is not entirely, or even primarily, scientific. Rather, for Newton the abstract God of traditional theology is not the God of scripture. Thus he poses the question whether it is more agreeable to religion "that the substance of God is not present in all places, or that the Jews more correctly called God 'Place' (*Locum*), that is the substance in which we are placed and (as the Apostle says) in which we live and move and have our being?" (1978, p. 121).

### Creation, Freedom, and Laws of Nature

The highly orderly and mechanical universe offered up by Galileo, Descartes, and Newton looks a very different place from the tempestuous, God-filled world of scripture. And certainly the new philosophy was an important source of the "deistic turn" in early modern religious thought. The potential slide from mechanism into minimalist deism was what most troubled Pascal about the Cartesian philosophy: "I cannot forgive Descartes. In all his philosophy he would have been quite willing to dispense with God. But he had to make Him give a 'fillip' to set the world in motion; beyond this, he has no further need of God" (1952, p. 186). Yet for Descartes, as for Boyle and Newton, God's creation is not once and for all, but the ongoing source of matter and motion. Most philosophers distinguished between God's "ordinary concurrence" by which he conserves the world according to a certain order (laws of nature), and God's "extraordinary concurrence" by which he sometimes disturbs the natural order (miracles). But nearly all give God a constant and direct role in natural changes. Some conceive of this role as still allowing a "secondary" causality to creating things, though for certain Cartesians, such as Malebranche, God is so involved in natural processes as to deprive them of intrinsic causal power. This doctrine of "occasionalism," which has roots in Islamic medieval theology (see Chapter 10, *The Islamic Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology*), later influenced the development of minimalist, empiricist conceptions of causality and the laws of nature. For Berkeley the laws of nature are nothing but the regular pattern of sense ideas caused by God, while for Hume causal relations involve no necessary connections at all, either in God or in themselves. Though certainly no occasionalist, even Newton relied on divine intervention to occasionally re-wind the clock of the universe and maintain the stability of the solar system.

However, in later Newtonians like Laplace the clock is fully self-winding, so to speak, and Newton's universe becomes thoroughly closed and deterministic. Within such a world, the traditional question of human freedom is more pressing than ever. Anti-theistic determinists, including Laplace, Spinoza, and d'Holbach, generally rejected human freedom as illusory. But British thinkers working within the context of the strongly providentialist orientation of early Protestantism were predisposed to the traditional project of reconciling freedom and determinism. In correspondence with Bishop

Bramhall, Hobbes declares that “he is free to do a thing, that may do it if he have the will to do it, and may forbear if he have the will to forbear” (EW vol. 5, p. 38). Punishments, both human and divine, are warranted if their objects act freely. Given an action is free in this sense, the further question whether the will itself is free is dismissed by Hobbes as absurd. In his treatment of freedom in the *Essay*, Locke adopts a very similar stance. But late in the discussion, added to later additions of the *Essay*, he seems to allow freedom even to the will itself in the form of a “power to hold our wills undetermined until we have examined the good and evil of what we desire” (1975 bk. 2, ch. xxi, 52). It is from this power to make considered reasons rather than present uneasiness determine our will that our moral responsibility derives. This notion of “reasoned” freedom is crucial to the defense by Locke, and subsequent Enlightenment thinkers, of civil liberty and toleration in matters of conscience and religion.

Then there is the question of God’s freedom. Given he has ordained a certain course of events, in what sense could God have done otherwise? On a voluntarist view, such as Descartes’, God’s will in creation is absolutely indifferent even with respect to the principles of logic. On an intellectualist view, such as Leibniz’s, God wills only what he antecedently knows to be best. British authors inclined to intellectualism with respect both to nature and to morality. If the laws of nature issue from God’s wisdom and goodness, then those laws will reveal something of his purpose. But if they issue only from his brute power, then natural theology, and the argument from design in particular, are hopeless: a book produced by an indifferent act can tell us nothing of the author. As Newton puts it in the General Scholium to the *Principia*: “We know [God] only by his properties and attributes, and by the wisest and best constructions of things and their final causes, and we admire him because of his perfections” (1999, p. 942). But if God’s creative act is entirely indifferent, how can we have the minimal expectation presupposed by science that nature will be uniform? This is the heart of Cudworth’s objection to Descartes’ extreme voluntarism: “if the natures and essences of all things, as to their being such and such, do depend upon a will of God that is essentially arbitrary, there can be no such things as science or demonstration” (1996, p. 25).

With respect to the moral realm, if the laws derive simply from God’s brute power, rather than his moral insight, then our sense of moral duty amounts to nothing but prudential submission to a Hobbesian tyrant. Calvin voiced this concern about medieval voluntarism: “With reference to the sentiments of the Schoolmen concerning the absolute or tyrannical will of God, I not only repudiate, but abhor them all, because they separate the justice of God from his ruling power” (1960, vol. 2, p. 950). Thus, Cudworth and other Cambridge Platonists argued that while morality depends in a metaphysical sense on God, its power to obligate derives from its own nature, innately apprehended, rather than from any external compulsion. Thus, in terms remarkably similar to Kant, Cudworth observes that the Law of Love within us frees us “from all law without us, because it maketh us a Law unto our selves” (1970, p. 124). The inward, self-determining yet divinely grounded approach to morality is developed further in the “moral sense” theories of Shaftesbury, and in the intellectual intuitionism of Joseph Butler and Samuel Clarke. But the moral intellectualist approach was subjected to challenges from both egoistic (Bernard Mandeville and Adam Smith) and sentimentalist (Francis Hutcheson and Hume) camps. Despite the efforts of Thomas Reid and the Scottish “common sense” school to sustain traditional British attitudes

in ethics and religion, the question of the theological grounding of morality was very obscure at the end of the eighteenth century, setting the stage for Kant's radical reconfiguring of both fields.

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# The Emergence of Modern Philosophy of Religion

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There seems to be no clear and consistent distinction between philosophical theology and the philosophy of religion. Yet, on purely linguistic grounds one would seem to have God and the other religion as its primary subject matter. I think it is not an accident that the editors of this volume used the term “philosophical theology” in the titles of the preceding five chapters, but switched to “philosophy of religion” for the present one. For during the time from David Hume and Immanuel Kant to Friedrich Nietzsche the focus shifted from philosophizing about God to philosophizing about religion.

Thus G. W. F. Hegel complains bitterly about the prevailing assumption that we do not know God, which, therefore, “permits us to speak merely of our relation to Him, to speak of religion and not of God Himself.” The result is that “we at least hear much talk ... about religion, and therefore all the less about God Himself” (1962 [1832], pp. 191–2).

The matter is not that simple, for talking about religion cannot so easily be separated from talking about God. Still, Hegel calls our attention to what amounts to a sea change in modern philosophy, the transition from philosophical theology to philosophy of religion in the narrower sense of philosophizing about religion. In light of his intended resistance to this feature of post-Kantian modernity, it is ironic that we owe to him more than to anyone else the notion that there is a subdivision of philosophy called the philosophy of *religion*, that he develops this in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, and that the three parts of these lectures are “The Concept of *Religion*,” “Determinate *Religion*,” and “Consummate *Religion*.” When philosophical theology will return in our own time, often as if nothing had happened in the meanwhile, it will call itself the philosophy of religion.

## Pre-Kantian Philosophical Theology

Two species of philosophical theology form the background for the movement Hegel deplores. I shall call them, rather loosely, scholastic and deistic. Both are concerned with exploring what can be established about the existence and nature of God by means of human reason unaided by revelation. But the scholastic versions of this enterprise share the Augustinian assumption that pure reason, on the one hand, and

faith, revelation, and authority, on the other, are harmonious and should be seen as working together. The deistic versions, by contrast, are concerned not merely with distinguishing but also with separating the two. They wish to bring religion, in Kant's phrase, "within the limits of reason alone." To that end they seek to separate the rational kernel of religion from the irrational husk that exceeds those limits in the direction of faith, revelation, and authority. Typical examples of the kernel are God as creator and God as author and enforcer of the moral law, not only in this life but in the life to come. Typical examples of the husk are anything miraculous or supernatural and the tendency to give essential significance to anything historically particular such as the life and death of Jesus. These general strategies are worked out in a variety of ways in the English deism of Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583–1648), John Toland (1670–1722), and Matthew Tindal (1657–1733); in the French deism of Voltaire (1694–1788) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78); and in the German deism of Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86), Gotthold Lessing (1729–81), and Kant (1724–1804).

Deism rather than scholasticism is the immediate precursor and even the beginning of the emergence here to be narrated. It can be called the religion of the Enlightenment. The horror of religious warfare and persecution hung heavy over European history, and when Enlightenment thinkers did not espouse an entirely anti-religious materialism, they sought above all to define a religion that would foster moral unity rather than immoral hostility within and among human societies.

This political agenda had both epistemological and ecclesiastical ramifications. For it was believed that a non-violent religion could only rest on the universality of reason and not on the particularity of any special revelation; nor could it reside in any church or sect which claimed authority in matters of faith and practice on the basis of such a revelation. In this context, Enlightenment rationalism (or the autonomy of reason) does not signify a rejection of the empiricist appeal to experience in favor of a purely *a priori* mode of thought; it rather signifies an appeal made by rationalists and empiricists alike to limit religion to those grounds, whether *a priori* or experiential, which are available to all people, at all times, and in all places. The contrast is not between reason and experience but between reason and faith, in so far as the latter is tied to special revelation and a particular "church."

Thus the deist project is motivated by three powerful, interlocking Enlightenment motifs: an epistemic concern for the autonomy of a universal human reason, a political concern for religious tolerance, and an anti-clericalism designed to deny to the Church both epistemic and political authority. This project clearly antedates the prevalence of the assumption, bemoaned by Hegel, that we do not know God and must therefore talk about religion. It is confident that, in one way or another, unaided human reason can know all we need to know about God. Still, in seeking to distinguish good religion (morally and politically speaking) from bad religion it begins the shift to philosophizing about religion. It is unembarrassed by talk about God, but it spends more of its energy talking about religion as a human, all-too-human social reality that is, for better and often for worse, a player on the stage we call history. The problem is less to prove God's existence than to make religion the ally rather than the enemy of morality.

Enter Hume and Kant. Their combined critique of the ontological, cosmological, and teleological proofs of the existence of God was a devastating blow to the many forms of

both the scholastic and the deistic projects that built on the foundation of those proofs (see Chapter 42, Ontological Arguments; Chapter 43, Cosmological Arguments; and Chapter 44, Teleological and Design Arguments). The widespread (if temporary) belief that Hume and especially Kant had said the last word on the subject is what Hegel referred to as the assumption that we cannot know God and must therefore only talk about religion. The pressing issue became: what can philosophy say about the religious dimension of human life now that the metaphysical proofs of God's existence have been taken away?

Enter Hume and Kant, again. It is not surprising that two thinkers who were as concerned as they were about the religious dimension of human life and who were as convinced as they were that the metaphysical foundations of scholastic and deistic philosophical theology had crumbled should point in new directions. But how different are those directions!

### Post-Kantian Reconstructions of the Deist Project

Kant is the deist who, having undermined the metaphysical foundations of many forms of deism, sought to provide the project with alternative foundations. Since this alternative comes in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) and *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793), which follow Kant's demolition of the theistic proofs in *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781; 2nd edn. 1787), we can speak of Kant as the first post-Kantian to try to rescue the deist project.

Kant's (re)formulation is distinctive in two ways. First, he claims that if there is no knowledge of God by means of pure (*a priori*) theoretical reason, we can have such knowledge by means of pure practical reason. Thus the *Critique of Practical Reason* develops moral arguments for God and immortality to take the place of the arguments discredited in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Second, Kant's account of *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* begins with an account of radical evil in human nature that departs drastically from the more typically optimistic view whose fullest expression is to be found in Rousseau (see Chapter 72, Sin and Original Sin).

In the final three books of *Religion*, Kant gives a classical account of the kind of religion that could be acceptable in the Age of Reason. It is grounded in universal reason and in the service of universal morality. Kant is especially concerned with clarifying the relation between religion and morality, and he does so in three basic principles. First, "morality does not need religion at all" – either in the discovery of what our duty is or in the motivation for doing it (1960 [1793], p. 3). Second, "morality leads inevitably to religion" (p. 7 n.). This is a reminder of the moral arguments for God and immortality given in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Finally, "religion is (subjectively regarded) the recognition of all duties as divine commands" (p. 142). As such it is an aid, useful if unnecessary, to the moral life.

But there can be "no special duties to God in a universal religion, for God can receive nothing from us" (p. 142 n.). It follows that such "means of grace" as prayer, church attendance, baptism, and communion are illusions that belong to "fetish-faith" if they are conceived as anything but means to the ends of moral living. A charitable interpretation would have Kant saying that there can be no love of God separate from the love



of fellow humans, but the text seems to make the stronger claim that religion is exclusively concerned with our duty toward one another, that even God is nothing but a means toward human morality.

Kant continues his attempt to bring the Christian religion within the limits of reason alone by drawing corollaries concerning Christ and the church. The true church can only be the ethical commonwealth created on earth by the moral self-improvement of human persons. The "Augustinian" overtones of Kant's account of radical evil are here replaced by a mostly "Pelagian" soteriology and ecclesiology. Christ, in turn, can be of significance only as an archetypal ideal of moral perfection. Any "Christology" within the limits of reason would be a construction of pure reason, independent of historical fact and historical knowledge. Here Lessing's principle (1957 [1777], pp. 51–6) that rational knowledge of God must depend on nothing historically contingent is employed, not to reject traditional Christian themes but to reinterpret (or, perhaps, "demythologize") them radically.

Unlike Kant, the Romantic Friedrich Schleiermacher and the anti-Romantic Hegel are not properly described as deists. But with Kant they are major figures in the post-Kantian effort to reformulate the deist project. Schleiermacher addresses an audience unsympathetic not only to the metaphysical quarrels of scholastic and deistic philosophical theologies, whose claims about providence and immortality he dismisses as "externals" (1958 [1799], p. 14), but also to the moral rigorism of a Kantian alternative. Both metaphysics and morality belong to the husk of religion; its kernel is to be found in feeling, in "the immediate consciousness of the universal existence of all finite things, in and through the Infinite, and of all temporal things in and through the Eternal" (p. 36).

Schleiermacher's explicit enthusiasm for Spinoza, whom he describes as "full of the Holy Spirit" (1958, p. 40), suggests a pantheistic move away from the deistic and theistic notions of God as a personal being distinct from the created world. Thus he writes:

The sum total of religion is to feel that, in its highest unity, all that moves us in feeling is one; to feel that aught single and particular is only possible by means of this unity; to feel, that is to say, that our being and living is a being and living in and through God. But it is not necessary that the Deity should be presented as also one distinct object.

Such a representation would be "vain mythology" (p. 50).

Schleiermacher's "church" would be the communion of all who recognize the feeling or immediate contemplation of the unity of all in the Infinite and Eternal as the only true religion. But this does not mean the simple rejection of the churches committed to some specific system of metaphysical beliefs and moral or liturgical practices. Such a church is only "an association of persons who are but seeking religion ... the counterpart of the true church" (p. 157). But "I would have you discover religion in the religions. Though they are always earthly and impure, the same form of heavenly beauty that I have tried to depict is to be sought in them" (p. 211).

This advice is possible because Schleiermacher believes that the universal kernel must clothe itself in particular ideas and practices. The immediacy of religious feeling needs to be mediated in some concrete form, however contingent. The important thing

is to remember that such ideas and practices are neither necessary nor sufficient for true piety. With reference to any particular beliefs and practices, their absence is no barrier to true religion, while their presence is no guarantee of it.

Hegel is too much the speculative thinker to be satisfied with either Kant's reduction of religion to morality or Schleiermacher's reduction to feeling. Religion must be the knowledge of God, and while Hegel finds Kant's theology unconvincing, he finds Schleiermacher's, to which he is more sympathetic, simply confused. He rejects all Romantic claims to immediacy on the grounds that they either are empty of all conceptual content whatsoever and thus compatible with every absurd belief and every immoral practice, or have a content that needs to be articulated and defended. The appeal to immediacy is merely dogmatism in disguise. Schleiermacher is just kidding himself when he thinks his own talk about the Infinite and Eternal is not already a conceptual mediation that requires analysis and argument as much as more traditional talk about Trinity, Incarnation, atonement, and so forth.

Hegel thus assigns to himself the twin tasks of defending metaphysical theorizing in the aftermath of Kant and of developing a religiously significant metaphysics. He undertakes these tasks primarily in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), his *Science of Logic* (1812–16), and his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1817, 1827, and 1830). His central thesis is that the content of religion and philosophy are the same but that they differ in form, with only philosophy having the conceptual form adequate to true knowledge. The religious form is too tightly tied to sensory images and historical narratives. Even the scholastic and deistic philosophical theologies, whose speculative instinct is to move beyond popular forms of religious representation, fail to free themselves sufficiently, for the concepts they employ are only suitable for a finite subject matter and not adequate to the Infinite and Eternal. Only a thoroughgoing reinterpretation of the philosophical concepts of Idea and Spirit can (1) justify philosophical speculation itself, and (2) provide us with concepts suitable for doing philosophical theology.

Hegelian idealism is a philosophy of the Idea much closer to Aristotle and Plotinus than to George Berkeley and Kant. But it is perhaps best understood as a form of Spinozism. It is unlike that of Lessing (whose sympathy for Spinoza distinguishes him from typical deists) in that it becomes the basis for the radical reinterpretation (demythologizing) rather than the rejection of traditional theistic and Christian themes; and it is unlike the Spinozism of Schleiermacher in that it will not hide in claims to immediate feeling but will seek to articulate and defend itself in philosophical argument.

Finally, it is unlike Spinoza himself, but not because Hegel takes God to be a personal being distinct from the created world. Only the understanding, which Kant rightly found incapable of knowing God, takes God and the world, or finite spirit and infinite spirit, to be distinct beings; reason understands that they "are no longer two" (1984–7 [the 1827 lectures] vol. 1, p. 425). Hegel's only defense against the charge that this is pantheism is that, unlike Spinoza, his highest category is spirit rather than nature or substance. When Spinoza says *Deus sive Natura* (God or Nature), Hegel replies *Gott oder Geist* (God or Spirit).

Religion is the elevation of finite spirit to absolute or infinite spirit. In its religious form, this is (mis)understood as the encounter with Someone Other. In its philosophical form it is the discovery that the highest form of human self-awareness is the sole locus

in which the infinite totality, which is the only reality, comes to self-knowledge and is spirit rather than just nature, subject rather than merely substance.

Religion as this elevation of the human spirit occurs in all the religions, but most fully and adequately in Christianity as the consummate religion. However, Christianity can play this role only when it takes on philosophical form and systematically reinterprets its basic themes. For example, it is the revealed religion, not because in Jesus and the prophets, the Bible, and the Church God has come to the aid of a human reason limited by finitude and wounded by sin, but because in its philosophical form human reason makes the true nature of God fully manifest. Or again, Incarnation is the central Christian truth. Jesus is not, however, to be seen as the unique locus of the identity of the human and divine; rather, he is the embodiment of the universal truth that the human as such is divine.

### Hume and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion

Modern philosophy of religion grew out of a deep dissatisfaction with historic Christianity. But the response of Hume and his followers was very different from that of Kant and his followers. Instead of seeking an alternative religion, inoffensive to modernity, they looked to see whether the problem might not lie at the very heart of religion and not in the disposable husks.

Suspicion, rather than skepticism, arises when instead of asking about the evidence for or against religious beliefs one asks what motives underlie religious beliefs and practices, and what functions they play in the lives of believers. In *The Natural History of Religion* Hume develops a notion of instrumental religion according to which piety is primarily a flattering of the gods grounded in selfish hopes and fears. The piety of self-interest immediately gives rise to self-deception, since the pious soul cannot acknowledge that it has reduced the sacred to nothing but a means to its own ends.

Self-interest and self-deception are basic themes in the hermeneutics of suspicion in Karl Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. With Marx the question shifts from motive to function, and thus from psychology to sociology. He asks what function religion plays in society and answers that it serves to legitimize structures of social domination. His theory of religion thus belongs to his theory of ideology. Every historical society involves economic and political exploitation, whether the victims are slaves, serfs, or wage laborers. Ideas that represent such an order as natural or rational are needed both to salve the consciences of the beneficiaries and to encourage cooperation by the victims, since violent repression by itself is never sufficient. Nothing does the job quite as well as religious ideas, for what higher justification could a social order receive than to be divinely ordained? For Marx, then, religion is primarily a matter both of social privilege seeking legitimation and of the oppressed seeking consolation.

For Nietzsche religion is rooted in the slave revolt in morals, but given his postulation of the will to power as universal, his slaves are less concerned with consolation than with revenge. Unable to give vent to their resentment physically, they join forces with the priests who help them to designate their dominators as evil. This gives them the satisfaction of moral superiority and, to the degree that it permeates the social order, it

makes the strong feel guilty. Divine perfection is defined in terms of the punishment of our enemies.

In this area Freud is as much the philosopher as the psychologist. He sees religion as wish-fulfilling illusion. At the ontological level it offers consolation in the face of nature's indifference to our desires and the harsh repression of those desires by the super-ego. At the moral level it offers cosmic support for the moral order when it is in our favor and cosmic leniency when it is not.

For Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud the claim tends to be that this is the whole story about religion. What suspicion reveals is all there is. But this assumption is not necessary, and this kind of suspicion is not the monopoly of secular thought. It is the key to the attack on Christendom that is the heart of Søren Kierkegaard's writings. Their critique of bourgeois Christianity is not directed toward its theology, which Kierkegaard largely shares, but toward its double ideological function. By equating the present social order with the kingdom of God it not only confuses something finite and unfinished with something absolute and ultimate; it also tells the individual that God asks nothing more than that I be a respectable member of this society. The biblical tension between Jesus and every established order is lost. For Kierkegaard, suspicion is motivated by faith seeking to purge itself of idols rather than unbelief trying to rid the world of religion.

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## Part III

# Philosophy of Religion and Religious Philosophy in the Twentieth Century

## American Pragmatism

NANCY FRANKENBERRY

The most important intellectual movement produced in the United States, pragmatism embraces the writings of Charles Sanders Peirce, Josiah Royce, William James, George Santayana, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead in the first half of the twentieth century, and of Wilfrid Sellars, W. V. O. Quine, Hilary Putnam, Nelson Goodman, and Richard Rorty in the second half. The various forms of pragmatism are distinguishable one from the other mainly in terms of the degree of dependence on the primacy either of experience or of language, and the degree of paradigmatic status accorded to natural science.

The American philosophers who dealt with religion in the period from the 1870s to the 1930s brought both naturalism and pragmatism to bear on such topics as religious experience, the meaning and reference of "God," the nature of religious truth, and the community of interpreters (see Chapter 41, Religious Language; and Chapter 48, Religious Experience). Beginning with Charles Sanders Peirce's claim that any difference in meaning, however fine, must make some sensible difference in the course of experience, pragmatism wielded a two-edged sword in relation to religious beliefs. Peirce and James thought the religious hypothesis (variously defined) could make an important positive difference in experience, but later pragmatists, cutting in the opposite direction, viewed religion as making a difference for the worse and as destined to be superseded.

### Charles Sanders Peirce

Considered the founder of pragmatism, Peirce (1839–1914) worked as a logician, an experimental scientist, and a mathematician. His pragmatism, theory of signs, phenomenology, and theory of continuity were governed by a conception of evolutionary change according to which the universe manifested a developmental teleology. From 1880 on, Peirce was committed to the view of nature as pervaded by chance or spontaneity, creatures as partially free, and the future as partly indeterminate. Beliefs were treated as habits of action and truth defined as inquiry.

Two seminal essays, "The Fixation of Belief" (1877) and "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" (1878), suggested important new ways of treating truth and meaning,



respectively. The pragmatic maxim of meaning was “to consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of the effects is the whole of our conception of the object” (1931–58, vol.5, p. 402). The proper method to fix beliefs relied on a process of inquiry in which a community of investigators would eventually converge on truth, in the infinite long run. In the meantime, all beliefs, whether scientific or religious, were fallible and criticizable. The superiority of science over other methods was due to its corrigibility.

In his metaphysical investigations Peirce was an early anti-foundationalist, abandoning the Cartesian quest for incorrigible grounds for knowledge claims. The process metaphysics he developed defended the threefold claim that there is a connectedness or continuity between and among elements in the world (synechism); the role of chance in the universe is real and ineradicable (tychism); and a principle of cosmic convergence and love is fundamental to the continuous cosmos (agapeism). Out of three simple categories of possibility (“firstness”), actuality (“secondness”), and necessity or law (“thirdness”), Peirce developed a complex and intricate system. All sign-functioning was also understood in terms of a triadic relation of sign, object, and interpretant.

For philosophy of religion, Peirce’s most intriguing contribution concerns the Humble Argument found in his 1908 essay, “A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God.” The Humble Argument concluded that God (signifying *ens necessarium*) is real (see Chapter 33, Necessity). The neglected defense of that argument showed that this conclusion is instinctive; rational belief in God was universally accessible. More notable for making explicit the stages Peirce considered common to any scientific or religious inquiry than for its conclusion, the argument highlighted musement and abduction. As an “argument,” it was a process of thought reasonably tending to produce a definite belief, rather than an “argumentation” proceeding upon definitely formulated premises. It was rooted in musement, or pure play and free flow of ideas, intimations, apprehensions, or speculations. Musement moved from vague apprehension through imagination toward hypothesis, that is, to a belief that could be made the subject of inquiry. The vague sense of a whole within which all things relate is one example and the idea of God is another. Although not knowledge, musement could yield a possible subject matter for inquiry.

The vague hypothesis of God was an “abduction,” a generative process neither deduced from evidential premises nor inductively generalized from them. Now known as “inference to the best explanation,” abduction was an important branch of logic for Peirce, along with deduction and induction, which comprised the next two steps in the neglected argument. Deduction or explication of the God-hypothesis was to proceed in two stages of inquiry, according to analogies and further guesses, as well as logical deductions or predictions from the hypothesis that would make a pragmatic difference in experience. Finally, the inductive step would test the validity of the hypothesis. To render the God-hypothesis more precise, however, was to make it vulnerable to falsification.

Religion as much as science was in principle oriented to objective truth and must, like science, subject its doctrines to the test of experience. Peirce thought religion was a universal sentiment, more a way of living than a way of believing. Critical of the unqualified description of God as eternal or immutable (see Chapter 32, Eternity; and

Chapter 38, Immutability and Impassibility), his theism was left somewhat vague, functioning as a kind of regulative hope of the possibility of inquiry. Commentators are divided on whether Peirce's theism should be interpreted according to process philosophy in a panentheistic way (Donna Orange) or in a more traditional Thomistic direction (Michael Raposa) (see Chapter 17, Process Theology; and Chapter 20, Thomism). Peirce's injunction, "do not block the way of inquiry," and his vision of an endlessly self-correcting community of inquiry were to form a basis for Royce's recommendation that the Christian Church model itself on the scientific community.

## William James

William James' (1842–1910) chief contributions to philosophy of religion are often mistakenly associated only with his arguments in *The Will to Believe* (1897) and his conclusions in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). In the first, he argued that in the presence of "genuine" options that are "momentous, forced, and lively" an individual has a right to believe a hypothesis that cannot be proved by direct evidence (see Chapter 50, Pragmatic Arguments). But here he overinflated the distinction between intellectual and passional interests, and problematically defined the religious hypothesis to mean "perfection is eternal." In the second, he argued that indirect verification of the religious hypothesis could be conducted by careful psychological studies, which showed that the conscious mind was "continuous with a wider self through which saving experiences come," and that powers were at work in the world that might help to save people from various forms of shipwreck when they could not save themselves.

But too much has been made of James' assertion of "piecemeal supernaturalism" in *The Varieties* and not enough attention devoted to the "pluralistic pantheism" he espoused in his last published lectures on *A Pluralistic Universe* (1910). James became too good a historicist over the course of his career to remain content with stale dualisms between nature and supernature, the temporal and the eternal, the physical and the mental. The overbeliefs he expressed tended to defend a species of justified hope more than to warrant propositional belief. The radical empiricism which complemented his pragmatism provided a notion of "experience" that could bear the weight of a naturalized theory of religious experience while avoiding the charge of subjectivism invited by *The Varieties*. "Pure experience" and "reality" came to the same thing for James, but radical empiricism described the reality of experience as relational, as broader than sensation, and as giving rise to artificially carved-out distinctions, such as that between subject and object, or mind and matter, that are purely functional and contextual, rather than ontological. Radical empiricism was distinguished from other, disjunctive empiricisms by virtue of its insistence that conjunctive relations were a vital feature of experience and were felt as directly given in experience. On this basis, the "More" that James associated with religious experience in *The Varieties* can be understood as referring not to *another* world but to a *wider* world.

Impressed by the facts of struggle and pluralism, James formulated his pluralistic pantheism to allow for the likelihood that "the absolute sum-total of things may never be actually experienced or realized in that shape at all, and that a disseminated, distributed, or incompletely unified appearance is the only form that reality may yet have

achieved" (1977, p. 25). This was a rejection of the monistic view which held that the divine exists authentically only when the world is experienced all at once in its absolute totality. Spurning both extreme monism as well as extreme pluralism, James envisioned a single universe of nature in which "the whole" is neither absolutely one, nor absolutely many, and both human and non-human powers cooperate together. The whole exhibits "concatenated unity" or a multiplicity of irreducibly particular events in the midst of intricate patterns of relatedness. Unlike Royce and F. H. Bradley, James found himself "willing to believe that there may ultimately never be an all-form at all, that the substance of reality may never get totally collected, that some of it may remain outside of the largest combination of it ever made." Like recent postmodernists who resist totalizing intellectual gestures, James was clear that "'ever not quite' has to be said of the best attempts anywhere in the universe at attaining all-inclusiveness. The pluralistic world is thus more like a federal republic than like an empire or a kingdom" (1977, p. 145). While conceding that monism, like pluralism, could also stimulate strenuous moods, James noted that "[P]luralism actually demands them, since it makes the world's salvation depend upon the energizing of its several parts, among which we are" (James 1909, p. 227). To the end, James himself was haunted by the possibility that "[T]he world *may* be saved, *on condition that its parts shall do their best*. But shipwreck in detail, or even on the whole, is among the open possibilities" (James 1911, p. 73). As a lifelong sick-souled type, he complicated the healthy-mindedness of his pragmatism with the sense that humans are not finally captains of their ships, masters of their fate, or controllers of their ultimate destiny, that voluntarism could sometimes lead to virtue, but that willpower would only go so far in the face of evil, suffering, failure, and the inevitability of death.

## John Dewey

In *A Common Faith* (1934) Dewey (1859–1952) aimed to divorce the meaning of the adjective "religious" from the traditional sense of the noun "religion." He could then define the religious as "any activity pursued in behalf of an ideal end against obstacles and in spite of threats of personal loss because of conviction of its general and enduring value" (p. 19). Life was lived with a religious quality whenever and wherever anyone experienced "a sense of human nature as a cooperating part of a larger whole" (p. 18). This pragmatist spirituality could be achieved in a variety of ways, "sometimes brought about by devotion to a cause; sometimes by a passage of poetry that opens a new perspective; sometimes as was the case with Spinoza ... through philosophical reflection" (p. 14). In all cases, the religious dimension or function was felt as having the force of bringing about a better, deeper, and enduring adjustment to life. The adjustment or harmony of self with environment was attended by a calm resulting less from particular causes than from life changes that "pertain to our being in its entirety."

On the problem of how the self is integrated as a whole, Dewey made three proposals. First, the religious aspect of experience pointed to some complex of conditions that operated to effect a significant adjustment in life, a reorientation that was transformative and integrative in effect. Second, imagination played a key role in the unification of the self in harmony with its surroundings. Both the ideal of the whole self and the

ideal of the totality of the world were held as imaginative projections, although the work of self-integration, far from being a matter of willpower simply projected by the self, was itself dependent upon "an influx from sources beyond conscious deliberation and purpose" (1934, p. 19). Third, insisting that "we are in the presence neither of ideals completely embodied in existence nor yet of ideals that are mere rootless ideals, fantasies, Utopias," Dewey proposed that the real object of faith and source of spiritual regeneration was nothing supernatural but rather "the unity of all ideal ends arousing us to desire and action," or, alternatively, "the active relation between the ideal and the actual" (p. 34). The distinctive values that Dewey himself wanted to uphold against what Walter Lippman would call "the acids of modernity" were identical with the democratic life of inclusiveness, openness, and growth.

This was the naturalistic meaning of God consistent with a common faith. As such, the divine was rooted in the natural conditions of history and the material world while transcending any single time and place. Unlike the Hegelian idea of God as the unity of the ideal and the real, Dewey's pragmatic naturalism captured the evolutionary, processive-relational sense of "uniting" as an ongoing activity. Impressed early in his career with the neo-Hegelian notion of a cosmic organic unity in which the ideal and the real are one, Dewey's struggle to slough off the vestiges of idealism was solved by affirming the "continuity" of the many with each other as many, but not their literal oneness.

Criticized for offering only a form of secular humanism, excessive optimism, and little sense of sin or tragedy, Dewey's philosophy of religion had considerably more resonance and breadth than *A Common Faith* alone reveals. In addition, readers should consult two other sources: *Art as Experience* (1934), which Dewey worked on at the same time as *A Common Faith* and in which the aesthetic character of his thought is more apparent; and *Experience and Nature* (1925), in which the attitude of natural piety is evident. (These richer aspects of Dewey's philosophy of religion are brought out well in Steven Rockefeller's 1991 study.) In brief, consummatory experiences of quality or value were for Dewey the very aim of human praxis. In aesthetic experience the continuities of form and matter appeared directly and with consummatory power that was a good in itself. Works of art created a sense of communion which could in turn generate or shade off into religious quality. The sense of belonging to a whole which accompanied intense aesthetic perception also explained the religious feeling. "We are, as it were, introduced into a world beyond this world which is nevertheless the deeper reality of the world in which we live in ordinary experience. We are carried beyond ourselves to find ourselves."

Nature in turn was understood as both thwarting and supporting human efforts. Humankind was continuous with and dependent upon an environing world which, however imperfect or riddled with ambiguity, should evoke "heartfelt piety as the source of ideals, of possibilities, of aspirations" (Dewey 1929, p. 244). This made natural piety a genuine and valuable part of human life in the world, needing more careful cultivation and expression in order to play a positive role in the development of society and culture. Although no antecedent being could be presumed in whom an integration or unification of all ideal ends was already accomplished, Dewey repeatedly appealed to "a sense of the whole," "the sense of an enveloping whole," "the sense of this effortless and unfathomable whole" that is experienced as a natural response of the human

organism to its environment. In *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920) he described “the miracle of shared life and shared experience” as bound up with a vital feeling of unity with the universe. In *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922) the enveloping world of nature was identified as “the totality of natural events” and described as vague, undefined, and indiscriminated, hardly capable of objective presentation. Present emotionally in “appreciations and intimations” that yield feelings of freedom and peace, the sense of an enveloping whole could sustain and expand selves in feebleness and failure.

Amplifying the status of “wholes” and the close relation between the aesthetic and the religious in Dewey’s thought, we might say that “the religious,” reconstructed naturalistically, represented an intensification and broadening of the aesthetic quality of experience, having to do with what Dewey called “consummatory moments,” involving “fulfillments” and “immediately enjoyed meanings.” Wholeness was the quality that linked aesthetic experiences, ordinary secular experiences, and religious experiences. Every experience, according to Dewey, possessed a peculiar “dim and vague” quality, of “margins” or “bounding horizon.” It was a sense of an “enveloping undefined whole.” Any work of art could be described as a whole which elicited and accentuated a sense of “belonging to the larger, all-inclusive whole which is the universe in which we live.” The difference between aesthetic and religious experiences was one of degree, not of kind. Natural piety, in contrast to aesthetic experience, sought an unrestricted field of value whose harmony involved an ever-enlarging synthesis of the widest range and deepest contrasts of relational data.

However, the all-inclusive whole of nature was not a unitary subject or a single, complex, organic individual. Dewey’s final verdict was that the conditions and forces in nature and culture that promote human well-being were plural. In contrast to H. N. Wieman’s thesis, he found no inherent unity to the forces and factors which made for good. The organizing and integrating of these forces or factors was the work of human imagination and human action.

## Contemporary Directions

Currently, pragmatism’s agenda is being set by a variety of American philosophers of religion who elaborate a conceptual basis for antifoundationalism without sheer fideism, for pluralism without radical relativism, and for secular forms of “transcendence” without otherworldliness. These include: Jeffrey Stout’s “modest pragmatism,” influenced by Richard Rorty’s neopragmatism and Robert Brandom’s inferentialism; H. S. Levinson’s “festive Jewish American” pragmatic naturalism, which draws inspiration from George Santayana; Cornel West’s “prophetic pragmatism,” which harks back to the Jewish and Christian tradition of prophets; William Dean’s “naturalistic historicism,” derived from the Chicago school of religious empiricism; and Sheila Davaney’s “pragmatic historicism,” which delineates a new methodological direction for theology in the twenty-first century. These authors typically emphasize that religious beliefs are tools for dealing with reality, rather than representations; they attend to historically contingent forms of consensus and social practice within religious communities, rather than correspondence to the intrinsic nature of things; and they view commitment to democratic communal activism as one of the consequences of pragmatism in religious

life and thought. Following out the Peircean line of pragmatism's development, Robert Neville's "paleopragmatic" philosophy and Robert Corrington's "ecstatic naturalism" build upon the metaphysical insights of the classical tradition.

An important shift in contemporary pragmatism occurred with the work of Willard V. O. Quine (1908–2000), Donald Davidson (1917–2003), and Richard Rorty (1931–2007). By focusing on the relation between language and the rest of the world rather than between experience and nature, these "linguistic pragmatists" combined a naturalistic, Darwinian view of human life with an antifoundationalist, holist account of meaning and truth. A fruitful area of research for philosophy of religion's habitual interest in the concept of "truth" is now open, with some pragmatist philosophers of religion ready to jettison the so-called pragmatist theory of truth in favor of the holist account. If there are only semantic explanations to be offered for why it is the case that a given sentence is true just when its truth conditions are satisfied, this will have profound implications for how religious truth-claims are handled.

At least two other features of pragmatism have yet to be fully exploited in philosophy of religion. First, pragmatism entails a rigorous challenge to the use of such distinctions as cognitive-noncognitive, scheme-content, objective-subjective, intellectual-emotive. To the extent that debates in philosophy of religion are still riddled with these invidious contrasts, pragmatism stands for purging them on the grounds that the same events are needlessly hypostatized into two descriptions, one propositional and one not. Second, pragmatist philosophy of religion has yet to pursue the implications of what James meant when, following Peirce's plea, he called for "the reinstatement of the vague to its proper place in our mental life." To take pragmatism as a method of inquiry into that which is *vague* in human understanding, located on the fringes, not at the focal region of awareness, requires exploration of the transitions, felt qualities, and indeterminacies of experience – the very data that could figure in a pragmatist reconstruction of the causes, consequences, and reference range of religious phenomena.

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# 16

## Personalism

PATRICIA A. SAYRE

### Introduction

Personalism, in its broadest sense, is a philosophical stance that takes the concept of personhood to be indispensable and central to a proper understanding of reality. As a self-conscious movement, or more accurately, family of movements, personalism flourished in the first half of the twentieth century with distinct but related branches in Europe and the United States. Both branches of personalism share a commitment to Christian theism and are motivated by practical as well as philosophical concerns.

### European Personalism

In the period between the two world wars, European thought was characterized by a number of movements responsive in one way or another to a growing sense of crisis in human affairs. Among these movements were an array of philosophies sometimes described as personalisms, but more commonly known by other names. These included the theistic existentialism of Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, Martin Buber, and Nikolai Berdyaev, and the neo-Thomism of Jacques Maritain and Étienne Gilson (see Chapter 18, Phenomenology and Existentialism; and Chapter 20, Thomism). European personalism as a movement in its own right centered around the work of the French philosopher Emmanuel Mounier. Mounier was founder and guiding spirit of *Esprit*, a journal committed to promoting dialogue between representatives of divergent points of view, but especially to encouraging exchange between Marxists and Christians. The Christian community, Mounier believed, needed to pay more attention to the social and economic conditions in which human life is embedded, while the Marxists needed to realize that these conditions do not constitute the whole human story.

Personalism on Mounier's reading is not, however, a political program. And, insofar as the central affirmation of personalism is the existence of free and creative persons, it is less a philosophical system than a method for drawing us into the thick of things by alerting us to the conflicting processes of personalization and depersonalization at play in human history. To be a person is to be in the process of becoming a person and hence to be contributing to the process of personalization. We become persons through

the activity of choosing, and with each choice we make we transcend and hence must sacrifice our former selves. This transcendence, Mounier is quick to add, is not in the direction of detachment from the material conditions of human life. Mounier wants to avoid not only mind-body dualisms but all dualisms of the material and the spiritual order. To be a person is to live an embodied existence, and, precisely because we are embodied, we are situated from the start in a world that extends beyond our own immediate selves. Mounier's transcendence is thus an inherently generous "overflow of personal being" that moves us in the direction of ever deeper communion with others. This communion respects the integrity of the other while at the same time recognizing the mutuality of endeavor required if the process of personalization is to continue. Fear, egotism, and a distaste for sacrifice can keep us from realizing ourselves as persons, but so too can social and political structures that impose repetition and sameness on human life. Hence, while personalism is not in itself a political platform, personalist convictions are bound to have political implications. For Mounier they implied a pacifist socialism that he hoped would gradually transform capitalist technology into an ally rather than an enemy of human creativity. In other historical circumstances personalist convictions might point in quite different political directions.

At the same time that it leads to a proliferation of forms of human life, Mounier claims, the process of personalization brings us ever closer to an ultimate unity of humankind that recognizes each person as significant and irreplaceable in the position he or she occupies in the world of persons. The progressive realization of this unity is what Christians call the coming of the "kingdom of God." Mounier believes that Christianity in its original conception has much to contribute to the fuller realization of the personal, affirming as it does the incarnational unity of matter and spirit in a multiplicity of unique, whole, and free individuals. Christianity also shares with personalism an outlook of "tragic optimism" in which commitment to the process of personalization must be total at the same time that it can never be more than conditional. We must, Mounier insists, throw ourselves wholeheartedly and hopefully into the project of becoming persons despite our awareness that our own particular versions of this project will almost certainly prove inadequate and need to be transcended.

In sum, Mounier offers us a philosophical vision in which the primacy given to the personal provides the catalyst for transforming depersonalizing economic, political, social, and religious structures so as to make possible lives that are lived freely and creatively as "open adventures." Such lives are the only "proof" that can be offered for Christianity and the existence of a personal God.

### American Personalism

More systematic in their approach than Mounier, the American personalists are equally suspicious of abstractions that divorce philosophy from the concrete experiences that constitute our lives. American personalism was hence from the start associated with a series of social reform movements responding to the needs of the day. Its founder, Borden Parker Bowne, was an outspoken defender of women's suffrage; over the years, Bowne's philosophical heirs at Boston University applied personalist principles in defense of socialism, pacifism, and, perhaps most famously, racial equality. Personalism

had a significant impact on the American civil rights movement through the activities of Martin Luther King, Jr., who as a graduate student at Boston University studied under Bowne's immediate successor, Edgar Sheffield Brightman.

Bowne's 1908 publication of *Personalism* came at a time when the partnership between religion and intellectual life that had led to the founding of so many American institutions of higher education was beginning to show signs of strain. The shift from theological to mechanistic explanation effected by modern science, combined with the additional boost Darwinism had given to philosophical naturalism, raised serious doubts about the intellectual respectability of religious belief. Bowne attempts to lay these doubts to rest by arguing that philosophical naturalism is beset by insuperable difficulties, offering instead a theistic version of personal idealism that he claims is more consistent with our lived experience. In his concern to make lived experience the ultimate arbiter in philosophical debates, Bowne reflects his ties to his pragmatist cousins (see Chapter 15, American Pragmatism).

Bowne willingly acknowledges the value of naturalistic descriptions in ordering certain aspects of our experience. The philosophical naturalist, however, moves beyond description to explanation, asserting that all of reality can be understood in terms of mechanical interactions between material objects. Forgetting that the impersonal terms in which we couch our scientific descriptions are the product of personal activity, the philosophical naturalist reverses the proper order of explanation and insists that personal activity (like everything else) is the product of impersonal forces. Consequently, philosophical naturalism encounters a number of seemingly intractable problems generated by its own procedures. How, for example, can naturalism give an adequate account of the qualitative feel of things using only the quantitative language of force and motion? Or, how can naturalism render comprehensible those of our physical attitudes and movements – kissing a loved one, or kneeling in prayer – that appear so inexplicable when abstracted from the context of persons acting with their purposes?

Even beyond the difficulties attending the reduction of personal activities to impersonal happenings, it remains a serious question whether philosophical naturalism accomplishes anything useful. The claim that we can describe all phenomena in terms of matter in motion is so general

as to include all things at the expense of meaning practically nothing. ... [T]o be of any use to us, it must go beyond these superficial generalities of classification, and must descend into the realm of causation, and also give account of the specific peculiarities or differentia of concrete things. (Bowne 1908, p. 228)

Yet when offered as an account of the way in which specific things arrived at the typically complex states in which we find them, naturalism founders on a contradiction. If the natural order is all there is, whatever led to these states being as they are must be immanent in that order; thus whatever happens now or in the future has been potentially present all along. Potentiality, however, has to be something other than the actual arrangements of material masses if it is to explain such arrangements – but naturalism is committed to there being nothing over and above these arrangements.

To make matters worse, the philosophical naturalist typically assumes space and time to exist independently of experience as containers for arrangements of physical

matter. Bowne argues that neither space nor time can be conceived as independently real without generating a whole host of contradictions involving the conflicting demands of unity and infinite divisibility; he thus concludes that space and time function as forms structuring our experience. Following Kant, Bowne insists that these forms are not arbitrary: "there must be something in the dynamic relations of the system which demands just this order and no other" (1908, p. 139). But to look for this "something" as Kant did in a realm of unknowable things-in-themselves only introduces further mysteries; explanation by appeal to that which cannot be known is no explanation at all, while any claim to know something about these hidden objects merely presumes further structuring and hence requires further explanation.

The solution to these difficulties is to assume the existence of a dynamic power behind knowable objects which is not another object, known or unknown, but a center of active knowing. For Bowne, to be a dynamic center of active knowing is just what it is to be a person. Thus the ultimate explanation of the order we discern in nature is found in persons and their activities. That there are persons in the plural and that they are capable of communication Bowne takes to be a given supplied by lived experience; it is impossible, he claims, to maintain serious doubts that we are sharing our experience with others. When we consider the matter carefully, he adds, the most effective explanation for the high degree of coincidence among our individual experiences is to "plant behind the phenomenal system ... a Supreme Intelligence which manifests his thought through it and thus founds [its] objective unity" (1908, p. 78). Bowne makes no claims to have thus proven the existence of God; he claims merely to have identified the hypothesis making most consistent sense of our experience.

Bowne's critique of philosophical naturalism thus leads directly to a theistic personal idealism reminiscent of George Berkeley but responsive to Kant (see Chapter 12, *Early Modern Philosophical Theology on the Continent*; and Chapter 14, *The Emergence of Modern Philosophy of Religion*). It was left to Bowne's student, Edgar Sheffield Brightman, to explore systematically the implications of personal idealism for our conception of God. Brightman adopts what he describes as an "empirical approach to God," proposing likely characteristics of the divine person based on our experience of ourselves as persons. For example, if God is a person and persons are centers of activity, then, Brightman reasons, God must be a temporal being, for activity implies process and process implies temporality. Arguments for an atemporal God that appeal to the apparently atemporal contents of our experience when we think about logic, mathematics, or morals are, Brightman claims, based on a misunderstanding of that experience. If we take seriously the claim that personal activity is the fundamental reality, the contents of our thoughts in such cases must be construed as permanently recurring patterns that exist only through our thinking, rather than atemporal realities existing independently of thought. A properly temporalist analysis of our experience is particularly important in the case of our thinking about morals, for were moral experience construed as a passive encounter with values as independently existing objects, rather than an active striving to body forth value, we would cease to view ourselves as responsible moral agents. This line of reasoning implies that if God as a personal being is also a moral agent, then God too is engaged in a temporally structured process of moral striving.

To understand how this divine striving is possible, Brightman claims, we need to conceive of God not merely as temporal but also as limited. This is not to say that God is limited in the sense of having a beginning or end in time. God's limitations, rather, are of the following two sorts: First, limitations are placed on God's will and intellect by the activities of other persons. These limitations are freely chosen by God as part of an ongoing decision to share the activity of creation by stepping aside to allow for the free play of other wills. The outcome of this free play, in Brightman's account, can come as a genuine and not always pleasant surprise to God. Hence God's striving must be in part redemptive – a struggle to use outcomes otherwise evil in themselves to create something good. By conceiving of a personal God as limited in this way, Brightman argues, we not only build on what we know experientially about the limitations that one person's activities can place on another person's activities, but we are also able to make some sense of the existence of moral evil without compromising God's goodness (see Chapter 58, *The Logical Problem of Evil*; and Chapter 59, *The Evidential Problem of Evil*).

To account for natural evil, Brightman assumes a second, internal set of limitations on God. We best understand these limitations by returning once again to our own experience. Human experience, in Brightman's analysis, involves at any given moment the following three factors: an activity of willing, a rational structure displayed by this activity, and an element of "brute fact" that gives this activity its content. Creation as an activity of the will thus presumes the unwilled elements of rational structure and brute fact as internal to the experience of that activity. In the case of divine creativity, Brightman calls these uncreated parts of God's experience the "Given." He writes that "the Given is, on the one hand, God's instrument for the expression of aesthetic and moral purposes and, on the other, an obstacle to their complete and perfect expression" (1958, p. 342). That God's will is at times at least partially thwarted by the internal obstacles supplied by the Given is evidenced by the occurrence of natural evils. And yet, while God's will may be limited, God's goodness is not, and thus "no defeat or frustration is final." God's unlimited love is forever finding "new avenues of advance" (1958, p. 342).

As we have just seen, Brightman wants to offer an account of divine activity grounded in what we know about human activity. Exploring the relationship between these two forms of personal activity is the central task in the work of Peter Bertocci, Brightman's student and successor at Boston University. Less interested than his predecessors in defending a metaphysic of personal idealism, Bertocci is primarily concerned with exploring the implications of the personalist notion that human persons function as co-creators with the divine person. Arguing in the same vein as Brightman for a finite and temporal God, Bertocci suggests that we think of God as both conductor and composer of a symphony in which human persons are the players. The players respond creatively in their interpretive interactions with the created score, while the Composer-Conductor also responds creatively to the performance of each player. The metaphysics of creation, in this model, involve "Creator and co-creators in the ebb and flow of a responsive-responsible cosmic community in which the sensitivity of free spirits to each other and to their Creator is reflected in every moment of human and divine history" (Bertocci 1970, p. 222).

In a world where persons are co-creators with God, surprising felicities as well as unfortunate tragedies are bound to arise when the freely chosen activities of one person intersect with those of another. The felicities are easier to accept as signs of grace than the tragedies. We may try to buy security from tragedy by curtailing the freedom of others, but this is to deny ourselves the highest form of loving. If we are to move beyond prudential to creative love, we must risk letting others be the persons they are. This is the risk God takes in creating human persons, and what distinguishes God most crucially from us, Bertocci claims, is God's greater capacity to suffer for the sake of this creative love. Creative love is given its ultimate expression in forgiveness – a form of loving that refuses to give up on other persons but continues the effort to work creatively with them whatever harm they may have done. As co-creators with God, we too have a responsibility to practice forgiving love: “[T]o be able to forgive is to reach perhaps the highest peak of moral creativity in human experience. The person who can forgive is not only proving that he is a creative person, he is increasing the power and quality of his creativity” (1958, p. 86).

Bertocci thus presents religious life as a willingness to live with the creative insecurity that comes from loving other persons. This creative insecurity has much in common with Mounier's vision of human life as an open adventure. In both cases we become persons through the free and creative choices we make as members of a community of other persons, and in both cases, although these choices can at times be unfortunate, even the most tragic can be redeemed as part of the progressive realization of the kingdom of God.

## Conclusion

Although interest in personalism and personalist themes has persisted, personalism itself as a cohesive philosophical movement with a distinctive metaphysic and social program is on the wane. In Europe, social and economic changes have robbed Mounier's particular version of personalism of some of its political urgency. In America, changes in philosophical fashion have shifted many philosophers' interests away from systematic accounts of reality and toward more specialized pursuits within the philosophical subdisciplines. The philosophy of religion, for example, is often approached as one specialty among others rather than as one thread in the weave of an overall perspective on the world. Shifting fashions and politics notwithstanding, there is much to be learned from personalism with its emphasis on the personal as being of prime importance in a world assumed to have been created by a personal God. Philosophers of religion, in particular, would do well to heed the personalist call to take seriously the personal character of the God most theists worship – a God who often gets displaced by a more abstract and impersonal “God of the Philosophers.”

While the personal idealism that Bowne and Brightman put at the center of their philosophy may strike some as excessive in the priority it gives to the personal, the real difficulty may be their failure to give enough weight to the personal. Although they assert that the rational principles structuring our experience have no reality independent of personal activity, both Bowne and Brightman seem to treat these principles as curiously unconditioned by that activity. Principles of reason, argues Brightman, must



be the condition of, rather than being conditioned by, even divine creative activity; were it not the case, this activity would be fundamentally non-rational and all communication between the divine person and human persons would break down. This argument, however, presumes a rather narrow conception of the possible forms of communication between persons. While it certainly is true that a good deal of our communication is discursive, and hence reliant on some rational principle or other, persons can also communicate with one another in a variety of non-discursive modes. The notion that the structure of discursive communication might grow out of these non-discursive modes need not, as Brightman assumes, mean an end to rationality and communication. Personalist arguments regarding the nature of God based on this assumption may thus need rethinking.

This need is, of course, entirely consistent with personalism as a philosophical outlook. At the very core of personalism, in both its American and European versions, is a commitment to ongoing revision that undermines any attempt at final systematization. This aspect of its method works against personalism ever succeeding as a rigidly defined philosophical movement. Indeed, as Mounier wrote, “the best future one could wish for Personalism is that it should awaken in every man the sense of the whole meaning of man, so that it could disappear without trace, having become the general climate of our days” (Mounier 1962, pp. 111–12).

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## Process Theology

DAVID RAY GRIFFIN

The term “process theology” usually, as here, refers to the theological movement inspired primarily by Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) and secondarily by Charles Hartshorne (1897–2000). Whitehead, after having devoted most of his professional life to mathematics and natural philosophy, turned to metaphysical philosophy at the age of 62, upon being invited to teach in the Philosophy Department at Harvard in 1924. Although he had long been agnostic, perhaps atheistic, his turn to metaphysics quickly led to a type of theism. Whereas his Lowell Lectures delivered in February 1925 contained no positive reference to God, their publication later that same year as *Science and the Modern World* contained an affirmation of God as the “principle of limitation” (or “concretion”). In *Religion in the Making* the following year and even more clearly in *Process and Reality* in 1929, this impersonal principle is expanded into an actuality responsive to the world. Hartshorne, who had already developed similar ideas about both God and the world, incorporated much of Whitehead’s thought, while differing on some points.

In Whitehead’s usage, “metaphysics” is the attempt not to describe things that are beyond the possibility of experience but to explain the coherence of *all* things that *are* experienced. Whitehead’s shift from the philosophy of nature to metaphysics meant the inclusion of the human perceiver, which raises the mind-body problem (see Chapter 65, Theism and the Scientific Understanding of the Mind). Whitehead’s approach led to “a recurrence to that phase of philosophic thought which began with Descartes and ended with Hume” (Whitehead 1978 [1929], p. xi) to overcome errors that led to the Kantian turn to idealism. As “a recurrence to pre-Kantian modes of thought” (p. xi), process theology is a form of realism, with regard to both God and the world (see Chapter 76, Theological Realism and Antirealism).

The chief error of René Descartes was the conception of matter as “vacuous actuality,” as wholly devoid of experience, which makes the body’s ability to interact with the mind utterly mysterious. One solution was to explain their interaction – whether thought to be real or merely apparent – by appeal to divine omnipotence. Alternatively, George Berkeley’s idealism denied the actuality of matter, explaining our sensory perceptions as God’s direct impressions on our minds. Both approaches involved “an appeal to a *deus ex machina* who was capable of rising superior to the difficulties of metaphysics” (Whitehead 1967 [1925], p. 156), which is “a device repugnant to a

consistent rationality" (Whitehead 1978, p. 190). Although Whitehead himself assigns an explanatory role to God, he rejects a supernaturalistic type of theism. He also rejects, due to its inability to explain the unity of our experience and its self-determining freedom, the materialist denial of the mind as an actuality distinct from the brain.

The key is to realize that the notion of matter as vacuous actuality arises from "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness," in which abstractions, useful for certain purposes, are equated with concrete actualities. We can understand what other actual entities are in themselves only by analogy with the part of nature known most directly, our own experience. Whitehead hence agrees with Berkeley that we can think meaningfully about *actual* entities only as *perceiving* things. He disagrees, however, with Berkeley's conclusion that the world of nature must be *merely perceived* and thereby non-actual. While avoiding the fallacy of misplaced concreteness with regard to matter, Berkeley, like Descartes, committed it with regard to mind, by identifying mind with *conscious* perceptions and thoughts. Whitehead here follows Gottfried Leibniz, who said that subjectivity, experience, or perception can be generalized all the way down, so that even the lowliest individuals bear some analogy with the human mind. Given this non-dualism, the interaction of mind and body can be understood naturalistically (see Chapter 12, Early Modern Philosophical Theology on the Continent).

Leibniz himself did not achieve this naturalism, because his monads were "windowless," having no openings to be influenced by each other. Their apparent interaction had to be explained as a harmony pre-established by God. Whitehead modified the Leibnizian structure by installing windows. Evidently influenced by Buddhism (see Chapter 2, Buddhism), quantum physics, and William James (who said that our experience comes in "drops"), Whitehead portrayed each enduring individual, from a human mind to an electron, as a rapidly repeating series of "occasions of experience," each of which begins as an open window into which rush influences from the past world (see Chapter 15, American Pragmatism). Once this efficient causation has constituted the occasion's "physical pole," the occasion makes its own self-determining response, which is its "mental pole." When the occasion's self-determination is completed, it becomes an object for subsequent occasions, exerting efficient causation on them. Through this perpetual oscillation between efficient and final causation, there is a mixture of real influence and freedom.

Positing an iota of self-determination at the subatomic level is a necessary but not sufficient condition for human freedom. The conventional view is that any indeterminacy at the quantum level is eliminated in perceptible things by the "law of large numbers." Things such as sticks and stones are "confused aggregates," in which all individual spontaneities are mutually thwarting, so that the things as such have no freedom (Whitehead 1967, p. 110). However, some larger things are not mere "aggregational societies" but "organisms of organisms," in which a higher-level series of occasions of experience, with greater mentality, arises. Atoms, cells, and animals are examples. In societies of this type, the higher-level occasions of experience, with their greater capacity for self-determinism, are "regnant" or "dominant" occasions because they exert a guiding influence over the society as a whole, giving it a unity of partly self-determining action.

This same distinction between aggregational societies and what Hartshorne (1972) dubs "compound individuals" (the distinction that is, according to Hartshorne, the

greatest discovery of Leibniz) also answers the most common objection to this type of philosophy, which is traditionally called “panpsychism” but is better named “panexperientialism” (although Whitehead used neither term and Hartshorne preferred “psychicalism”). This objection is that such philosophies imply that rocks have feelings. The “pan-” in panexperientialism, however, does not mean that literally all things, including aggregational societies such as rocks, have experience, but only that all genuine *individuals* do. On the basis of this doctrine, the traditional mind-body problem can be given a unique solution (Griffin 1998).

Another error of the pre-Kantian period, perpetuated by Kant himself, is the doctrine that all perception is by means of our physical sensory organs. Whitehead’s rejection of this sensationist doctrine is implicit in the fact that, having agreed with the Berkelean view that to be an actual individual is to perceive, he assigns perception to cells, atoms, and electrons (as well as, to be mentioned later, God). He uses “prehension” for the non-sensory form of perception shared by all individuals. Sensory perception, if it occurs, is a derivative mode, which is illustrated by the fact that, when we see a tree, we see it *by means of our eyes*. The sensory image of the tree presupposes that I – as the series of dominant occasions of experience – have prehended my brain cells, through which the information from the eye is derived. Memory provides another example of this non-sensory perception, as a present occasion of experience directly prehends earlier occasions.

This distinction between prehension and sensory perception is central to overcoming another problem of modern philosophy: the distinction between theory and (the presuppositions of) practice. The classic example – alongside that of presupposing freedom while espousing determinism – is provided by David Hume, who said that we have no empirical knowledge of either causality (as real influence) or the existence of an “external world.” We must, accordingly, espouse solipsism and define causation as mere “constant conjunction,” even though in practice we cannot help presupposing a world of causally efficacious actualities. Whitehead rejects this antirational disjunction:

Whatever is found in “practice” must lie within the scope of the metaphysical description. When the description fails to include the “practice” the metaphysics is inadequate and requires revision. (Whitehead 1978 [1929], p. 13)

Lying behind this statement is a more rigorous version of the “commonsense” criterion that Thomas Reid had employed against Hume: “[T]he metaphysical rule of evidence [is] that we must bow to those presumptions, which, in despite of criticism, we still employ for the regulation of our lives” (1978, p. 252). This version includes only those notions that are truly common to all people because they are *inevitably* presupposed in practice. Also, whereas Reid explained these commonsense notions as supernatural implantations, Whitehead accounts for them naturalistically. (These two differences also distinguish Whiteheadian “common-sense beliefs” from the “basic beliefs” of reformed epistemology, see Chapter 79, Reformed Epistemology.) Most of them, including causation, are accounted for by our non-sensory prehensions.

Sensory perception as usually understood, which Whitehead calls “perception in the mode of presentational immediacy,” indeed gives no knowledge of either causal efficacy

or other actualities. In this mode, one is aware of, say, a green shape, which in itself tells no tales of its origins. Hume concludes that it arises from “unknown causes.” But we usually *do* know where visual data come from, namely, the eyes – thanks to our non-sensory “prehension,” which Whitehead also calls “perception in the mode of causal efficacy.” In this mode, we directlyprehend other *actualities* beyond our own conscious experience – most directly our bodily members – which is why none of us are solipsists in practice; and we prehend these other actualities *as causally efficacious* for our own experience, which gives us the notion of causation as real influence.

Two other commonsense notions explained by this non-sensory mode of perception involve values and a Holy Reality. Most modern philosophies cannot account for our presuppositions about values because, not being physical things, they are not perceivable through our senses. Whitehead’s philosophy, while allowing for enough free construction to account for cultural differences, avoids complete relativism by portraying our notions of truth, beauty, and goodness as rooted in non-sensory prehensions of a realm of values.

The other prevalent reason for denying objectivity to values, stressed by Martin Heidegger, is the inability to conceive how a realm of values could exist, given the “death of God.” The idea that the fabric of the universe does not include a realm of values led to the “disenchantment of the world” (Max Weber). While rejecting traditional theism, Whitehead did develop a concept of God in which eternal possibilities, including values, subsist. Our prehension of this aspect of God, which Whitehead calls God’s “primordial nature” and from which each experience receives an “ideal aim,” lies behind our awareness of values. This idea allows process thinkers to affirm “re-enchantment without supernaturalism” (Griffin 2001).

Besides experiencing God in terms of normative values inherent in God’s primordial nature, we can also experience God as fully actual, which Whitehead calls God’s “consequent nature” because it is responsive to the happenings in the world. Far from being characterized by impassibility, God is “the great companion – the fellow-sufferer who understands” (Whitehead 1978, p. 351). If our prehension of God, which occurs at the unconscious level all the time, rises to consciousness, we speak of a religious experience (see Chapter 48, Religious Experience) or the experience of the “holy” (see Chapter 26, Holiness).

Because prehension and causal influence are two sides of the same relation, our prehension of God’s ideal aims is God’s action on our experience. This idea, in conjunction with panexperientialism, allows process theologians to speak of divine action (see Chapter 36, Divine Action) in nature: the cells, molecules, and still lower-level individuals making up the “physical world” differ only in degree from our own experience. The way that God influences us, by means of an aim toward the best values possible in a given situation, can therefore be generalized to God’s influence on all individuals. Process theologians have been able, accordingly, to speak rather straightforwardly of God as creator (see Chapter 37, Creation and Conservation), in the sense that God accounts for the directionality of the evolutionary process (Birch and Cobb 1981; see Chapter 64, Theism and Evolutionary Biology).

Speaking of divine activity does not raise an insuperable problem of evil because divine influence is exclusively persuasive (see Chapter 58, The Logical Problem of Evil; and Chapter 59, The Evidential Problem of Evil). Whitehead considers the idea,

enunciated (if inconsistently) by Plato, that “the divine element in the world is to be conceived as a persuasive agency and not as a coercive agency,” as “one of the greatest intellectual discoveries in the history of religion” (Whitehead 1933, p. 213). He also suggests that “the power of Christianity lies in its revelation in act, of that which Plato divined in theory” (1933, p. 214). Evil can occur in the world because God, while influencing all events, fully determines no events. Each event is necessarily influenced by its past world as well as by God, and each actual entity is partly self-determining, even vis-à-vis divine agency. This position differs from most “free will defenses” by applying to all, not only human, events, and also by saying that creaturely freedom is rooted not in a *voluntary* self-limitation by God but in the very nature of things: “[T]he relationships of God to the World should lie beyond the accidents of will,” being founded instead “upon the necessities of the nature of God and the nature of the World” (1933, p. 215). This naturalistic theism entails that God cannot occasionally violate the normal causal relationships.

Lying behind this denial is the rejection of creation *ex nihilo* (from nothing), in the absolute sense (Whitehead 1978, pp. 95–6). What exists necessarily is not simply God alone but God-and-a-world – not our particular world, with its contingent forms of order, but some world or other. This point can be expressed in terms of “creativity,” which is the ultimate reality embodied in all actualities. Whereas traditional theism said that the power of creativity exists necessarily only as instantiated in God, for process theology it is necessarily instantiated in both God and a plurality of finite actualities. Creativity, in its two forms of self-determination and efficient causation, belongs as much to finitude as it does to God. This is why God cannot cancel out, or override, either the efficient causation or the freedom of the creatures. In traditional theism, by contrast, because any creative power possessed by the creatures was theirs purely by divine volition, it could be freely revoked. It was this supernaturalistic doctrine of omnipotence (see Chapter 27, Omnipotence) that created an insoluble problem of evil.

Because of its alternative doctrine of divine power, according to which God necessarily exerts persuasive rather than coercive power, process theologians have developed a distinctive theodicy (Griffin 1976, 1991, Griffin in Davis 2001), which can fully accept the reality of genuine evil (which is one of our inevitable presuppositions) without suggesting, as do E. S. Brightman (see Chapter 16, Personalism), John Roth, and Frederick Sontag (Davis 1981, 2001), that God is less than perfectly good.

This replacement of a supernaturalistic with a naturalistic theism also allows for a reassessment of the widespread assumption that Hume and Kant have demonstrated the invalidity of all natural theology. Whitehead describes his own discussion of God as “merely an attempt to add another speaker to that masterpiece, Hume’s *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*” (Whitehead 1978, p. 343). Hume’s major argument, directed against both deism and traditional theism, presupposed the notion of divine omnipotence. Another argument depended on Hume’s understanding of causation as “constant conjunction,” which Whitehead has provided good reason to reject. Still another argument is that the notion of (efficient) causation is used equivocally in cosmological arguments (see Chapter 43, Cosmological Arguments) because the alleged creation of the world out of nothing is different in kind from the causation we experience in the world, from which we derive the very notion of causation. But



Whitehead's naturalistic theism does not suffer from that problem either (1978, p. 93; Griffin 2001, ch. 5).

No refutation of Whitehead's type of natural theology was provided by Kant, either, because Kant agreed that the order of the world provides evidence of an Orderer, denying only that it provides evidence for the omnipotent deity of classical theism (see Chapter 44, Teleological and Design Arguments). Kant is, accordingly, a witness for, not against, the kind of natural theology offered by process theology. Its version of this argument is that, given a vast plurality of finite actual entities with spontaneity, the order of the world betokens an Orderer. Another argument is from novelty: the emergence of novel forms in the evolutionary process implies an actuality in which previously unrealized possibilities subsist and by which they become effective. An argument from the human experience of values (see Chapter 45, Moral Arguments) can be regarded as a special version of the argument from novelty. Unlike Whitehead, Hartshorne (1941) defends a version of the ontological argument, but many process theologians do not accept its validity (see Chapter 42, Ontological Arguments).

With regard to the nature of God: process theology rejects divine simplicity (see Chapter 31, Simplicity) in favor of a "dipolar theism." Whitehead's version, which distinguishes between the primordial and consequent natures, is modified by Hartshorne (1941, 1948), who distinguishes between the "abstract essence" and the "concrete states" of God (Griffin 2001, ch. 4). Many of the traditional attributes of God, such as impassibility, immutability (see Chapter 38, Immutability and Impassibility), necessity (see Chapter 33, Necessity), and eternity (see Chapter 32, Eternity), apply to the abstract essence (which includes the divine existence), while the concrete states involve passibility (suffering with our sufferings and rejoicing with our joys), change, and contingency. For example, omniscience (see Chapter 28, Omniscience) belongs to the abstract essence of God, because God in every moment knows everything that is then knowable. Future events, not yet being actual, are not yet knowable, except as more or less probable. (There is no problem, accordingly, of foreknowledge and free will, see Chapter 56, Foreknowledge and Human Freedom.) This abstract attribute of omniscience is eternal, necessary, immutable, and impassible. God's *concrete knowing*, by contrast, changes in every moment, because there are always new things to know. It is contingent, because it depends on contingent happenings; and it is perfectly passible, because it involves perfect sympathy with the feelings of all the creatures.

Hartshorne also calls his doctrine "panentheism," which means that all things are *in* God. The relation between soul and body is used as an analog for the God-world relation, which means regarding God as the soul of the universe. On the basis of the hierarchy of compound individuals, Hartshorne (1972) takes the idea of divine omnipresence (see Chapter 29, Omnipresence) literally: just as the soul literally encompasses the region occupied by the brain, so God encompasses the world. The way in which the mind or soul prehends and is prehended by the brain cells provides the basis for understanding how God is affected by and influences the creatures (Griffin 2001, ch. 4). In one sense, the doctrine of divine incorporeality (see Chapter 34, Incorporeality) is denied, in that the world can be considered the body of God. In another sense, however, incorporeality is affirmed, in that there is no divine body *between* God and the world through which God could act coercively upon the world (Hartshorne 1941; Griffin 1991).



Although this entry has focused on Whitehead and Hartshorne as its founders, “process theology” is a movement involving a diverse group of theologians dealing with a wide range of issues. For example, because of its panentheism and panexperientialism, process theology has been employed as the basis for an ecological ethic, as exemplified by Birch and Cobb (1981), Cobb (1998), Daly and Cobb (1994), McDaniel (1989), and Howell (2000). Thanks to these emphases and others, such as internal relatedness and a non-coercive deity, process theology has also been closely intertwined with feminism (see Chapter 81, Feminism) in theology, as exemplified by Keller (1986, 2003, 2008). It has also proved fruitful with regard to the relation between science and religion (Barbour 1966, 1997; Griffin 2000) and in the area of interreligious dialogue (see Chapter 84, Religious Pluralism; and Chapter 85, Comparative Philosophy of Religion), as exemplified by Cobb (1982, 1999), Griffin (2005), and Suchocki (2003). These recent developments follow upon several decades in which Christian process theologians have used the philosophies of Whitehead and Hartshorne to understand traditional Christian doctrines, such as Christology (Cobb 1975; Ogden 1961), eschatology, and immortality (Suchocki 1988). Although most process theologians have followed Hartshorne in speaking only of “objective immortality,” others, following up Whitehead’s observation that his philosophy is neutral on the question of life after death, so that it is to be settled on the basis of empirical evidence, have affirmed this notion as well (Cobb 1965; Griffin, 1997, 2001).

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# Phenomenology and Existentialism

MEROLD WESTPHAL

Phenomenology, with its roots in Edmund Husserl, and existentialism, with its roots in Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, are two major traditions of twentieth-century philosophy. Husserl almost never philosophizes about religion; by contrast, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are incessantly preoccupied with questions of religion in general and Christianity in particular. Not surprisingly, when phenomenology and existentialism flow together in works like Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* and Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, there is more of interest to the philosophy of religion than is found in Husserl, if less than in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. This article will concern itself with the import of these two traditions for the philosophy of religion, but not with the explicitly theological appropriation of existential phenomenology in the work of thinkers like Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, and Karl Rahner.

## Phenomenology

Husserl's phenomenological project is the attempt to continue and to combine the projects of David Hume and René Descartes. Its Humean heritage, which we might call its experientialism, is the attempt to get back "to the things themselves," to allow things to show themselves to us directly and without the mediations and distortions of the pre-interpretations we bring with us from various theories and from common sense. The categorical imperative of phenomenology is "Shed your prejudices (pre-judgments); be attentive. Look, listen."

The Cartesian element is the quest for absolute clarity and certainty. Philosophy must be the one completely rigorous science and, as such, the foundation of all the other sciences. Its cognitions must be absolute in the sense of not being relative either to natural or to historical determinants. (My) consciousness must be the absolute point of reference for the world both as nature and as history. Thus the first beatitude of Husserlian phenomenology joins promise to command, "Blessed are the attentive, for they shall achieve absolute clarity and certainty."

There are three distinct ways in which phenomenology has become significant for the philosophy of religion. In the first place, it has contributed significantly to a way of doing philosophy of religion, often called phenomenology of religion, that is quite

different from the normative philosophical theology and philosophy of religion that have their roots in scholasticism and deism (see Chapter 14, The Emergence of Modern Philosophy of Religion). It is a descriptive approach that brackets the interrelated projects of evaluating and explaining religious beliefs and practices in order to attend as carefully as possible to ways in which the religious “object” (often generalized as the Sacred or the Holy) is given to the religious subject, sometimes designated “the believing soul,” but often recognized to be as much communal as personal. The goal is to understand what it means to be religious, where such understanding is viewed both as an end in itself and as a necessary prerequisite to any critical or evaluative philosophy of religion that would not lose touch with its subject matter (see Westphal 1998 and 2007).

The Cartesian element of the Husserlian project is present when the phenomenology of religion is motivated by the sense that reflection on religion can be “scientific” only if it abstracts from questions of truth and value and restricts itself to pure description. But even when the notion that description can be “pure” or “scientific” is rejected in terms of a more hermeneutical understanding of understanding, the Humean element is strongly present. Whether or not the phenomenology of religion aspires to be rigorous science, it seeks, without presupposing faith, to be faithfully attentive to the actual experience of the religious life. Just as it is a major task of the philosophies of science and of art to get clear, respectively, about what science and art are, so the phenomenology of religion seeks to show what religion is as human experience and practice.

The second way in which phenomenology has contributed to the philosophy of religion is through the notion of reverse or inverted intentionality. For Husserl, intentionality is consciousness of or about something, a mental act modeled on physical vision in which I direct my attention toward what thereby becomes my intentional object. This is an act of meaning conferral (*Sinngebung*), not in the sense that I make up the world as if it were fiction, but in the sense that it can be given to me only in the way in which I take it. The Cartesian notion of subjectivity as center and origin is fundamental here.

For inverse intentionality, my identity and the world’s meaning are given to me not so much in and through my own intentional acts of attending as in the acts of others before whom I am seen and by whom I am addressed. Intentional acts are arrows or rays directed toward me rather than emanating from me. I am no longer the measure of meaning.

This notion is developed in Sartre’s analysis of the Look (see below), according to which I am the desire to be God and as such do everything in my power to neutralize the gaze or address of the other. For Levinas, “The face speaks” (1969, p. 66). Under the gaze of the human other I am addressed, called into question, called to an infinite and unconditional moral responsibility, whether or not any actual words are uttered. Levinas uses such theological terms as *revelation* and *glory* to speak about this relation, giving to it an ambiguous religious significance. It is not clear whether the divine is reduced to that dimension of the human other which calls me to responsibility or whether in this relation I am pointed beyond both myself and the human other to a God who transcends us both.

Perhaps the most fruitful use of the notion of inverse intentionality for philosophy of religion is found in the work of Jean-Luc Marion. It is major to two of his central

themes. The first is the distinction between the idol and the icon. These are not two different kinds of religious object but two ways of intending or attending to the sacred. When I am the measure of the meaning of the sacred – when it falls entirely within the power of my gaze or the intelligibility of my conceptual scheme (theology) – the result is an idol. When that which I see or think points me beyond itself to the mystery that it expresses but does not exhaust, making the “object” the measure of me instead of the other way around, we have an icon. Referring to the icon in the narrower, more literal sense of the term, Marion says that “the icon opens in a face that gazes at our faces ... here our gaze becomes the optical mirror of that at which it looks only by finding itself more radically looked at” (1991, pp. 19–22). In other words, phenomenologically speaking God is most truly God, not when we are the ones who define and call on God but when God is the one who defines and calls on us (to repent, to believe, to love, and so forth).

Inverse intentionality is also central to Marion’s analysis of the saturated phenomenon (2002), a general category of phenomena to which revelation or epiphany belong. Once again this category involves the notion of a given that exceeds our capacity to receive, overwhelming our concepts and language; and once again an important key to the theological import of such a concept is not merely the infinity of God but the subjectivity of God, by whom we are seen and addressed.

### The Nineteenth-Century Roots of Existentialism

The third way in which phenomenology has become involved in the philosophy of religion is through its confluence with existentialism, especially in the work of Heidegger and Sartre. Their accounts of human existence draw methodologically on the work of Husserl (whose Cartesianism they significantly modify in the service of his Humeanism), but in terms of substance it is Kierkegaard and Nietzsche who are the crucial background. Their contributions might be summed up this way: in reflecting on the meaning of human existence, Kierkegaard demands that we take the reality of God more seriously than Christendom does, while Nietzsche demands that we take the unreality of God more seriously than secular modernity does. In its nineteenth-century origins, existentialism is already postmodern by its refusal to accept any of the standard interpretations of the conflict between faith and reason, theism and atheism, whether offered by religious orthodoxy, by militant atheism, or by the deisms and idealisms that sought a middle ground.

For Kierkegaard (by which is meant the flow of his writings, pseudonymous and otherwise, toward a religious interpretation of existence), this means in the first instance the teleological suspension of the ethical. This is the refusal to allow the laws or the customs of one’s people, along with the theories that legitimize such practices, to be the highest norm for life. When God is taken seriously neither the individual (the aesthetic stage) nor society (the ethical stage) is taken to be absolute, but both are seen in their finitude and sinfulness to stand before the judgment of God. The individualism that emerges is not an intensification of modernity’s atomistic quest for autonomy but just the opposite. The self is essentially relational, and yet because the social order in which it is naturally immersed is not fit to be the mediator of its relation to God, each self must

be awakened from the complacent slumber of that immersion (the relative relation) so as to stand alone before God (the absolute relation).

That slumber turns out to be dogmatic as well as complacent because it involves the tendency to absolutize not only the practices of one's social order but the ideologies that legitimate both them and it. Kierkegaard's assault on speculative philosophy (in the person of Hegel) is but the extension of the teleological suspension of the ethical into the realm of epistemology. Human finitude and sinfulness together combine to make the project of absolute knowledge at once comic and tragic. In short, if God is real, then the divine absoluteness renders everything human relative at best; every attempt to make human existence, whether individual or collective, practical or theoretical, its own foundation and norm is at once foolish and arrogant. The securities offered to the self by socialization and legitimation are radically put in question as being human, all too human.

Nietzsche's point of departure is that God is not real and that when religion is examined apart from the ontological support that theism would provide for it, it turns out to be the ideological support for a moral order that does not deserve our support. When secular modernity recognizes the full implications of its atheistic posture, it will see that it has lost its moral compass and has become human existence at sea, a freedom at once exhilarating and terrifying. New values will have to be created to replace the old, discredited ones.

What is wrong with the old values of ascetic and altruistic morality, according to Nietzsche, is that they are rooted in the resentment of the weak against the strong. As such they are expressions of the will to power of the weak; "good" and "evil" are the only weapons they have in the life and death struggle with those who would otherwise take ruthless advantage of them. Nietzsche is not offended by the will to power as such, but by the lack of honesty involved. For this reactive expression of the will to power vehemently denies that it is a clever form of egoism. Religions like Christianity and Buddhism, and philosophies like Platonism, are merely the metaphysical ideologies with whose help the weak seek to make themselves strong, the masters of society. Moral domination replaces military domination.

As the repeated use of the term "ideology" suggests, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are closer to Marx than to Hume and Kant. They are more concerned with the social function of religion than with debates about proving the existence and nature of God and worrying about the problem of evil in that connection. They represent a philosophizing about religion that is neither dispassionate description (phenomenology of religion) nor passionate debate over the truth of various religious beliefs (philosophical theology).

## Jean-Paul Sartre

The existential phenomenologies of Heidegger and Sartre do not simply continue the work of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, but that work is never very far beneath the surface of their thought. This is perhaps most obvious in the work of Sartre. In his famous essay, "Existentialism Is a Humanism" (Sartre 1947, and various anthologies), he acknowledges the existence of a Christian existentialism, but defines his own as the attempt to work out the implications of atheism. In the absence of a creator God we cannot



construe ourselves to be like artifacts, having a nature that stems from the prior design of the maker. Sartre's slogan "existence precedes essence" means that we define ourselves, giving meaning and guidance to our lives only after finding ourselves already on the scene. Nothing in the nature of things either determines or justifies our self-definitions or the values they entail.

To put this point more concretely, Sartre borrows the saying of Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov, "If God did not exist, everything would be permitted." For Sartre this loses its subjunctive character; God is dead and everything is permitted. This means both that morality has no foundation in either divine or human nature, and that the creation-talk at the heart of theistic religion (as Nietzsche and Ludwig Feuerbach have already said) is projection, attributing the definitions we give to our own life to someone else, God, rather than taking responsibility for them ourselves. Religion is essentially bad faith or self-deception.

Sartre emphasizes the terrifying rather than the exhilarating aspect of this freedom. He describes humans as "condemned to be free" and as those who experience their freedom in anxiety, abandonment, and despair. Over against the bourgeois complacency of secular modernity, he emphasizes the dark side of human experience and relates it to the most fundamental religious concern. In his interpretation of existence, the absence of God is the most fundamental fact about the world; just for this reason Kierkegaard is right in treating anxiety and despair as modes of relating to the human condition and not just as reactions to occasional unwelcome circumstances.

The literary existentialism of Franz Kafka and Albert Camus, as indeed Sartre's own literary works, can be read as working out in a different genre the same essentially Nietzschean project of trying to think through the death of God.

Sartre's *magnum opus*, *Being and Nothingness*, is less explicitly oriented to Nietzsche's death of God theme. Still, it can be read as an extended meditation on human existence in a world whose two most basic facts are the absence of God and the presence of the will to power. Sartre's individualism, like Kierkegaard's, presupposes that the self is essentially relational. It is the Other who teaches me who I am. But this Other, before whose look I experience fear, shame, and pride, is triply problematic. First, as an embodied self I am afraid of what the other self can do to me. Second, two of the three basic responses to the Other's look, shame and pride, concern my worthiness to be happy and not just my ability to be happy. Moreover, of these two, Sartre devotes considerably more attention to shame, suggesting that the Other is more conspicuous in judgment than in affirmation. This is not an empirical claim about the frequency with which I get praised; it is a phenomenological claim about the structure of my perception of the Other. Finally, even when the Other's look gives rise to pride, I am dependent on the Other for the meaning of my being. Nietzsche's will to power theme is interpreted in the light of Hegel's master-slave dialectic, and I perceive myself to be slave rather than master even when the Other is proud of me.

But I want to be the master, the absolute end to which others are the means, the absolute value by which others are judged. Accordingly I adopt one of two strategies before the look of the Other, or alternate between them. Either I seek to deny and eliminate the freedom and subjectivity of the Other by making the Other the object of my look, or I seek to possess and appropriate that freedom and subjectivity by manipulating it to my own ends. In both cases I seek to be master, reducing the Other to my slave.



In the sexual sphere, sadism and masochism are the enactments of these strategies, but in this context they become metaphors for the entirety of human relations. It is not just that the world is filled with hate and indifference; love itself is nothing more than the demand to be loved. As each will to power struggles to be master rather than slave, it seeks to be God, the absolute source of all judgments of worth and, as such, the justification of itself. Of course, this project cannot be realized and “Man is a useless passion” (Sartre 1992, p. 784).

In a footnote to this bleak account, Sartre adds, “These considerations do not exclude the possibility of an ethics of deliverance and salvation. But this can be achieved only after a radical conversion which we cannot discuss here” (1992, p. 534). It becomes clear that Sartre is a secular theologian of original sin (see Chapter 72, Sin and Original Sin). The will to power and the master-slave struggle that Sartre weaves together in his account are what Augustine calls pride as the darkness of the human heart. In Sartre’s account, as in Augustine’s, our freedom is so enthralled by this primordial self-assertion that short of a radical conversion we are neither able to love God, since we wish to be God ourselves, nor to love our neighbor as ourselves, since even our love is but the demand to be loved.

Although Sartre speaks of the Other as my “original fall” (1992, p. 352), he mostly portrays the deep egocentrism of human existence in secular language, and the evidence to which he appeals is consistently phenomenological rather than theological. He is, then, a secular Augustinian, living in a world filled with sin but devoid of grace. His work represents two challenging questions addressed to the philosophy of religion. Isn’t the question of God fundamental to human existence in ways that philosophical theology (including atheology – the presentation of arguments against belief in God) often loses sight of? Isn’t the tendency to radical self-assertion, by whatever name it is called, so deeply ingrained in our lives and so destructive in its effects that it deserves more attention from the philosophy of religion than it usually receives?

## Heidegger

While Heidegger explicitly adopts the phenomenological posture, he resists the existentialist label because, he insists, his fundamental question is about the meaning of being rather than human existence. Nevertheless, his approach to the question of being is by means of an analysis of *Dasein*, the name he gives to human being in the attempt to free thinking from the presuppositions built into such notions as self, soul, person, and so forth. *Dasein* is normally translated as being-there, or left untranslated, but it is an ordinary German word for existence. When Heidegger then restricts the term “existence” (*Existenz*) to *Dasein* and writes, “*The essence of Dasein lies in its existence*” (1962, p. 67), he guarantees that an existentialist reading of *Being and Time* will never be entirely eclipsed by other readings.

Whereas Sartre is overtly atheistic, Heidegger is methodologically agnostic. He wishes to pose the question of the meaning of being, which he takes to be prior to discussing the existence and nature of any being, including God. The critique of Western metaphysics that begins in *Being and Time* is thus not a contribution to the debate over the reality of God. But in the tradition of Martin Luther and Blaise Pascal it argues

against trying to talk about God with categories that have not arisen “from an inquiry in which faith is primary” (1962, p. 30). Interpreting reality in terms of mere presence or thereness, as presence-at-hand rather than readiness-to-hand, is a fallacy of misplaced concreteness that distorts beings of all sorts, including God. We have here the seeds of Heidegger’s later critique of ontotheology as the reduction of God to a means toward the human end of making the whole of reality intelligible by our standards.

Like Sartre’s interpretation of human existence, Heidegger’s has religious overtones. He complains that the interpretation of human finitude in terms of being created or being produced leaves *Dasein* at the mercy of categories as inappropriate to it as to God, the philosophical discourse of substance and the commonsense discourses of thing and object. He proposes an alternative, phenomenological (and thus pre-theological) interpretation of human finitude in terms of its temporality, spelled out in such notions as thrownness and being-toward-death. Human existence is much more open and much less stable or secure than substance-talk, whether dualistic or not, suggests.

It is on the theme of human fault, however, that comparison with Sartre invites itself. Heidegger gives detailed descriptions of *Dasein* as falling, of the call of conscience, and of the experience of guilt. But while the language is more nearly Augustinian than Sartre’s, the substance is far less so. For at this stage Heidegger has not taken his cue from either Nietzsche, or Hegel, or any other secular phenomenology of self-assertion. The result is an analysis so formal that Heidegger can deny, even if not entirely convincingly, that it has normative significance. If *Being and Nothingness* has no ethics because Sartre is an Augustinian who recognizes that conversion must precede ethics, *Being and Time* has no ethics because Heidegger’s phenomenology operates at a pre-ethical as well as pre-theological level of abstraction.

### Other Existentialists

Without denying the reality of the dark intersubjectivity Sartre portrays, Martin Buber (see Chapter 23, *The Jewish Tradition*) and Gabriel Marcel (see Chapter 16, *Personalism*) point to the possibility of an open, vulnerable, and giving relation to the Other, a posture that seeks to preserve the subjectivity of the Other without manipulating it. Then they point to this region as the horizon within which it makes sense to talk about God. In the objective world of subject and object, the I-it world, God and faith are at best square pegs in a round hole. Only in the intersubjective world of dialogue, belonging, availability, and being at another’s disposal can philosophical reflection be faithful to religious experience. Heidegger is right to question the adequacy of certain metaphysical discourses to religious subject matter.

By juxtaposing courage to contemporary modes of anxiety, Paul Tillich seeks to articulate a kind of Stoicism for the modern world, an ethic inspired by both the ancient Stoics and their modern disciples, Spinoza and Nietzsche. But when he speaks of the courage to accept acceptance he moves in biblical directions. On the other hand, Nikolai Berdyaev (in *The Destiny of Man*) develops an ethics of redemption and eschatological hope whose inspiration is consistently biblical. Berdyaev’s work can be read as seeking to provide what Sartre, in the footnote mentioned above, did not have time to discuss.

Lev Shestov (in *Athens and Jerusalem*) and Karl Jaspers (in *Reason and Existenz*, among other works) emphasize, with Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, the ways in which human existence transcends human reason, at least when the latter is interpreted as the project of conceptual mastery that renders everything clear and distinct. For Shestov this involves an explicit attempt to justify the appeal to revelation. Like Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus, he thinks it is the height of arrogance for speculative metaphysics to require God and human existence to conform to its theoretical prejudices. For Jaspers, by contrast, the challenge to reason involves distancing reflection from such isms as theism, atheism, and pantheism on the grounds that each puts too much faith in its own conceptual account of the world. The Encompassing, his name for the sacred, is the unthinkable, something we are never out of touch with but which we can never get in our sights, something which always exceeds our conceptual telescopes and microscopes.

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## Wittgenstein

JOHN HYMAN

Wittgenstein's early philosophy was worked out in the six years or so following his arrival in Cambridge, and published in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in 1922. After a long hiatus, he took up philosophy again in 1929, and soon began to develop the ideas which were published after his death – first in the *Philosophical Investigations*, the masterpiece of his mature philosophy, and then in editions of various notebooks, drafts, and collections of philosophical remarks. Both of these philosophies include highly original and influential views about the nature of religion. I shall discuss them in turn.

## 1

Wittgenstein said that the fundamental idea of the *Tractatus* is “that the ‘logical constants’ are not representatives; that there can be no representatives of the *logic* of facts” (TLP, 4.0312). Perhaps a simpler way of expressing this thought is to say that the *propositions* of logic are not descriptions. Frege thought that the propositions of logic describe timeless relations between abstract objects; Russell thought that they describe the most general features of the world. We arrive at the propositions of logic, according to Russell, by abstracting from the content of empirical propositions, and so the propositions of logic themselves describe the world we encounter in experience, but they do so in the most abstract and general terms.

Wittgenstein argued that Frege and Russell underestimated the difference between the propositions of logic and empirical propositions because they agreed in thinking, or assuming, that however different these kinds of propositions may be, however different the kinds of things they say *are*, they still have this much in common, that they say *something*. Wittgenstein's own view was that the propositions of logic say nothing; they contain no information whatsoever; they are simply *tautologies*: “For example, I know nothing about the weather when I know that it is either raining or not raining.” “[A]ll the propositions of logic say the same thing, to wit nothing” (TLP, 4.461, 5.43).

If logical propositions say nothing, what is it for a proposition to say *something*? The answer that Wittgenstein gave in the *Tractatus* is one that he later summarized as follows: “The individual words of language name objects – sentences are combinations of such names” (PI, sect. 1). Accordingly, the sense of a sentence will depend on the

meanings of the words which are combined in it, and the *way in which* they are combined. Just as the objects to which the individual words correspond can be combined or arranged in different ways, so can the words in a sentence; the sense of the sentence will depend on what arrangement of objects it presents to us. Hence, if a proposition says anything at all, it says that such-and-such objects are arranged in such-and-such a way. The only thing we can do with words is to describe, or misdescribe, the facts.

Thus, according to the *Tractatus*, “One name stands for one thing, another for another thing, and they are combined with one another. In this way the whole group – like a *tableau vivant* – presents a state of affairs” (TLP, 4.0311). This is known as the *picture theory of meaning*. Words are combined in sentences to form a *picture* or *model* of a possible state of affairs in the world. If the way that things are arranged corresponds to the way the words are combined, then the sentence is true; if not, then it is false.

In his own preface to the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein wrote that “the whole sense of the book might be summed up in the following words: what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence” (TLP, p. 3). So far, I have commented on “what can be said,” as Wittgenstein himself did, in the larger part of the *Tractatus*. But by doing so, I have broken the very rules which fix the limits of what can be said. For as soon as I try to explain how a sentence must be related to the state of affairs it represents, I try to do more with words than merely describe the facts (TLP, 4.12).

This implication of Wittgenstein’s doctrine, that philosophical propositions are themselves nonsensical, did not escape him. He states it explicitly at the end of the *Tractatus*:

The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said ... and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions ... // My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) (TLP, 6.53)

But it is not just philosophy that lies beyond the reach of language. Ethics, aesthetics, and whatever thoughts we might aspire to have about the meaning of life, or about God, all belong to what Wittgenstein calls “the mystical,” and they are alike incapable of being put into words. Nothing that touches on matters of value can be captured in words. Every human effort to address or even to articulate what Wittgenstein called “the problems of life” must be in vain: “When the answer cannot be put into words,” he said, “neither can the question be put into words” (TLP, 6.5).

If we accept Wittgenstein’s austere conception of language, and its consequence that the ethical, aesthetic, and religious aspects of human life – which he calls “the mystical” – cannot be put into words, we may feel tempted to conclude that the importance we attach to aesthetic experience, to ethics, and to religion is the result of an illusion. Alternatively, we may conclude that what can be put into words is paltry by comparison with what cannot. There is no doubt that Wittgenstein intends us to draw the latter conclusion. In fact, in a letter written in 1919 to a prospective publisher, Wittgenstein

says that the *Tractatus* “consists of two parts: of that which is under consideration here and of all that I have *not* written. And it is precisely this second part that is the important one” (SP, 94). This cannot have been an encouragement to a prospective publisher, but it is a telling remark.

Still, it is difficult to know what place, if any, God and faith have in the system of the *Tractatus*. God is mentioned four times, but only the last of these comments has anything to do with religion. It is this: *How things are in the world is of complete indifference for what is higher. God does not reveal himself in the world* (TLP, 6.432). The emphasis on the word “in” is Wittgenstein’s, and perhaps its significance is explained in the next remark but one: “It is not *how things are in the world* that is mystical, but *that it exists*” (TLP, 6.44). Thus, Wittgenstein may have wanted to intimate that God reveals himself in the fact that the world exists, the fact that “there is what there is” – though we must not forget that this is not strictly speaking a fact at all, and is therefore impossible to state (NB, p. 86).

We should not imagine that this is meant to be an argument for God’s existence. It would be a strange argument indeed, if this had been what Wittgenstein intended – one with a nonsensical premise and a nonsensical conclusion. What may be intended, however, is that a religious attitude is an attitude toward the world *as a whole*, an attitude in which it isn’t *how things happen to be in the world* that absorbs our attention, but *that it exists*. And a religious attitude can also be described as, in some sense, an acknowledgement of God, although of course it is an attitude which we must never attempt to articulate by *saying* that God exists: “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence” (TLP, p. 7).

This is what the *Tractatus* hints at, but a few remarks in Wittgenstein’s notebooks are more explicit. These remarks, which he wrote in July 1916, when the Austrian army in which he was serving was retreating across the Carpathian mountains and his life was in constant danger, identify God with “the meaning of life, i.e., the meaning of the world,” with fate and with the world itself (NB, p. 73f.). However, the impression they convey most forcibly is that faith consists in the ability to see that life has a meaning; that this in turn consists in living in such a way “that life stops being problematic,” for “the solution to the problem of life is to be seen in the disappearance of this problem”; and that living thus will enable one to achieve a sort of happiness – something perhaps akin to a Stoic calm – by detaching oneself from the uncontrollable contingencies of the world, and accepting it without fear (NB, p. 74; cf. TLP, 6.521). Wittgenstein incorporated some of these remarks into the *Tractatus*, and it seems that the rest continued to exert an influence on his thought, and remain, albeit with an altered emphasis, in the background of the *Tractatus*.

The *Tractatus* presents an austere view of human language, even a repressive one, for it denies the intelligibility of much of what we say, including everything that mattered most to Wittgenstein himself. He developed it by means of a brilliant, profound, and subversive critique of Frege’s and Russell’s philosophy of logic. But the doctrine that religious truths are ineffable has occupied an important place in the history of religious thought for a long time, and it is likely to appear plausible if one thinks that language cannot capture our profoundest feelings. Wittgenstein’s upbringing led him to revere musical creativity, and it is possible that his love of music made him receptive to this thought. The achievement of his early philosophy, so far as the philosophy of



religion is concerned, was to have formulated the doctrine that religious truths are ineffable in terms that are clear and explicit precisely because they are founded on a theory of language.

## 2

In the 1930s, Wittgenstein's philosophy of language was dramatically transformed, and his earlier view of religion could not survive the transformation. He abandoned the doctrines that a proposition is a logical picture compounded out of names whose meanings are the things they stand for, and that the intelligible use of language always serves a single purpose – to describe the facts. He came to believe, on the contrary, that the meaning of a word is its use in the language; that words can be used for an indefinitely broad and heterogeneous range of purposes; and hence that the task of philosophy is not logical, but hermeneutical. Philosophy, he now contends, does not consist in logical analysis, but in the description of our various "language-games." He continues to argue that the use of language to express religious beliefs is quite unlike the use of language to state facts, but he no longer infers that it must therefore be a *misuse* of language.

Wittgenstein's thoughts about religious belief in this period are preserved in scattered remarks, marginalia, and students' notes. He never intended to publish any material on the subject and never wrote about it systematically. Nevertheless, it is possible to glean a fairly clear picture of his views about the nature and justification of religious belief. He defended two principal doctrines: the first is a semantic doctrine, about the meaning of religious discourse; the second is an epistemological doctrine, about the justification of religious beliefs.

The semantic doctrine is that when we express religious beliefs in words, the sentences we use may look like the sentences we use to make existence claims or predictions, or to advance hypotheses, in our talk about mundane things, or in historical discourse, or in natural science; but in fact their use is entirely different. They express "something like a passionate commitment to a system of reference," Wittgenstein says. What is a system of reference? A system of coordinates, for example, is a conceptual structure, an intellectual apparatus, which enables us to think and talk about *location* in *mathematical* terms. Wittgenstein's view is that when we express religious beliefs, we express a passionate commitment to a conceptual structure, which enables us to think and talk about *life* in *religious* terms. The epistemological doctrine, which is meant to follow from this, is that religious beliefs are immune from falsification and from verification. Critics and apologists who mistake religious beliefs for hypotheses and muster evidence in their favor or against them confuse religious faith and superstition, Wittgenstein says (CV, p. 72).

Wittgenstein's semantic doctrine is an ingenious application of a powerful strategy, which depends, in his own words, on making a "radical break with the idea that language always functions in one way, always serves the same purpose: to convey thoughts – which may be about houses, pains, good and evil, or anything else you please" (PI, sect. 304). The enduring value of Wittgenstein's philosophy of mind and his philosophy of mathematics is due in large part to the original and fruitful ideas this strategy produced. Its application to the question about religious belief has a kinship with both,

but it is less successful than either. It is worth asking why, and I shall return to this question toward the end of this chapter.

The idea that religious beliefs transcend reason is of course not original. In modern philosophy, it extends back to Kant, but related ideas were advanced by many earlier writers, for example, Clement of Alexandria in the second century. And there is a premonition of the idea in the famous passage from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, which includes the statement that God chose foolish things to confound the wise (1:27). Presumably, Wittgenstein had this passage in mind when he said, in one of his lectures: "Anyone who reads the Epistles will find it said: not only that it is not reasonable, but that it is folly" (LC, p. 58). But it seems likely that he was captivated by the idea that religious beliefs transcend reason when he encountered it in Kierkegaard's writings, which evidently fascinated him for many years (see Schönbaumsfeld 2007). His originality consisted in linking this conception of religious belief with the semantic doctrine I have already described, thereby providing it with an entirely new foundation.

### 3

Let us begin with the semantic doctrine, taking the belief that there will be a last judgment, which Wittgenstein examines at some length, as an example. His stated intention is to show that "in religious discourse we use such expressions as: 'I believe that so and so will happen,' ... differently to the way in which we use them in science" (LC, p. 57). But he argues in favor of a far more surprising and radical idea, namely that believing in a last judgment does not mean believing that a certain kind of event will occur sometime in the future. This does not merely distance the use of an expression like "I believe that so and so will happen" in religious discourse from its use in science, but from any kind of prediction at all. Wittgenstein offers three main reasons in support of this idea.

First, he claims that if one person expresses the belief that there will be a last judgment and another person denies this, they don't contradict each other; whereas if one person predicts, say, that it will rain tomorrow and another person denies this, they do contradict each other. He writes as follows:

Suppose that someone believed in the Last Judgement, and I don't, does this mean that I believe the opposite to him, just that there won't be such a thing? I would say: "not at all, or not always." Suppose I say that the body will rot [i.e., irreversibly], and another says "No. Particles will rejoin in a thousand years, and there will be a Resurrection of you." If some[one] said: "Wittgenstein, do you believe in this?" I'd say: "No." "Do you contradict the man?" I'd say: "No." If you say this, the contradiction already lies in this. Would you say: "I believe the opposite," or "There is no reason to suppose such a thing"? I'd say neither. (LC, p. 53)

His second reason is that "p," "possibly p," and "probably p" are not related to each other in meaning in the same way when p stands for "there will be a last judgment" and when it stands for an observation or a prediction:

Suppose someone were a believer and said: "I believe in a Last Judgement," and I said: "Well, I'm not so sure. Possibly." You would say that there is an enormous gulf between us. If he said "There is a German aeroplane overhead," and I said "Possibly. I'm not so sure," you'd say we were fairly near. It isn't a question of my being anywhere near him, but on an entirely different plane, which you could express by saying: "You mean something altogether different, Wittgenstein." (LC, p. 53)

His third reason is that where religious beliefs are concerned, such as the belief that there will be a last judgment, "Reasons look entirely different from normal reasons." "They are," he adds, "in a way, quite inconclusive. ... Anything that I normally call evidence wouldn't in the slightest influence me." He illustrates this idea as follows:

Suppose, for instance, we knew people who foresaw the future; make forecasts for years and years ahead; and they described some sort of a Judgement Day. Queerly enough, even if there were such a thing, and even if it were more convincing than I have described, belief in this happening wouldn't be at all a religious belief. (LC, p. 56)

All three of these claims are contestable, and I shall comment on them in turn. Concerning the first, Wittgenstein is of course free to refuse to contradict the man who believes that the particles of his body will rejoin in a thousand years, but the two men do say contradictory things. For if one person says that something is the case and another person replies "No," we call this "contradicting," and they cannot both be right. This holds whether one says "The body will rot" and the other says "No!" or whether one says "The body will not rot" and the other says "No!"

Concerning the second, it is not clear exactly what Wittgenstein means by the phrase "an enormous gulf"; but if he means that the two men must have very different values, attitudes, or worldviews, this need not be so. Devout Christians and atheists may have similar values, attitudes, and worldviews, except of course where specifically religious questions are concerned, and there may be a much smaller gulf between them than there is, say, between a devout Christian in the twenty-first century and a devout Christian at the time of the Crusades, or between an Orthodox monk on Mount Athos and a devout Anglican lady in Boston (Massachusetts or Lincolnshire). This is not to say that the difference between being certain about something and being uncertain may not be very significant indeed – "a great gulf," so to speak. It may be so, for example, if what is at issue is the prohibition against torture, or the principle that killing innocent people is wrong. But even in these cases, a great gulf does not imply that logical concepts such as truth, implication, and contradiction do not apply, or apply in a peculiar way, or that people who feel uncertain about these principles "mean something altogether different" from people who feel certain about them.

Concerning the third, it is difficult to be sure what forecasting or predicting "some sort of Judgment Day" is supposed to mean; but if we turn from the future to the past, we can see what Wittgenstein means by saying, "belief in this happening wouldn't be at all a religious belief." For example, the belief that Jesus was condemned by Pontius Pilate and crucified – which well-informed non-Christians share with Christians – is not *per se* a religious belief; whereas the belief that the Son of God was condemned by Pontius Pilate and crucified surely is. But the fact that historical evidence *does* have a

bearing on the non-religious belief does not support the claim that it *does not* have a bearing on the religious belief. On the contrary, the religious belief that the Son of God was crucified combines the belief that Jesus was crucified and the belief that Jesus was the Son of God. So even if historical evidence has no bearing on the belief that Jesus was the Son of God (which is doubtful), it still has a bearing on the belief that the Son of God was crucified.

## 4

Wittgenstein's observations about contradictions, modal qualifications, and reasons are meant to show that "in religious discourse we use such expressions as: 'I believe that so and so will happen,' ... differently to the way in which we use them in science"; and that when a religious person makes the statement "I believe there will be a last judgment," he is not making a prediction, in the normal sense of the word. So, what is Wittgenstein's conception of religious belief? And if "reasons [for religious beliefs] look entirely different from normal reasons," what do reasons for religious beliefs look like?

Wittgenstein returns to these questions several times, but the clearest statements of his views are (unsurprisingly) in remarks he wrote down himself, rather than ones written down by students who attended his lectures. Here are two particularly important remarks:

It strikes me that a religious belief could only be something like a passionate commitment to a system of reference. Hence although it's *belief*, it's really a way of living, or a way of assessing life. It's passionately seizing hold of *this* interpretation. (CV, p. 64, 1947)

Life can educate one to a belief in God. And *experiences* too are what bring this about; but I don't mean visions and other forms of sense experience which show us 'the existence of this being', but, e.g., sufferings of various sorts. These neither show us God in the way a sense-impression shows us an object, nor do they give rise to *conjectures* about him. Experiences, thoughts, – life can force this concept on us. (CV, p. 86, 1950)

What general conception of religious belief do these remarks express? The answer, in a nutshell, is that Wittgenstein equates having religious beliefs with using a system of religious concepts to interpret life, and having the range of attitudes and emotional dispositions associated with the conception of life they make available to us – concepts such as sin, redemption, judgment, grace, atonement, and so on. And what is his conception of the reasons for which religious beliefs are held? The answer to this question is indicated by the second quotation, but I shall approach it gradually.

As I have indicated, I understand the phrase "system of reference" to mean a system of concepts. Now one of the fundamental claims in Wittgenstein's later philosophy is that the systems of concepts we use cannot be justified by reference to reality, because they cannot either conflict with the facts or accord with the facts. Some systems of concepts are more powerful, or more convenient for a given purpose, than some others. For example, a coordinate system with a curved axis is more convenient for mapping flight-paths, whereas a system with a rectilinear axis is more convenient for making city maps. But whereas a map will conflict with the facts if it is false, and accord with

the facts if it is true, a system of coordinates is, so to speak, an intellectual apparatus we use to construct truths and falsehoods: in itself it cannot be either true or false.

We have seen that Wittgenstein held that a religious belief must be “something like a passionate commitment to a system of reference” – in other words, a passionate commitment to the use of religious concepts to interpret life – and also that a system of concepts cannot be verified or justified by comparing it with the facts. We should therefore expect him to hold that religious beliefs cannot be verified or justified *in this way*. But once again the position he takes is more radical than we might expect. For he denies that a person who holds religious beliefs can be *reasonable* or *unreasonable*:

I would say, they are certainly not reasonable, that's obvious. 'Unreasonable' implies, with everyone, rebuke. I want to say: they don't treat this as a matter of reasonability. Anyone who reads the Epistles will find it said: not only that it is not reasonable, but that it is folly. Not only is it not reasonable, but it doesn't pretend to be. (LC, p. 58)

The people Wittgenstein regards as *unreasonable* are apologists for, or against, religion who make the assumption that religious beliefs can be corroborated or falsified by evidence, or who make religious belief appear reasonable – something he describes as “ludicrous.” But unless religion is confused in this way with something quite different, it is not *unreasonable*. “Why shouldn't one form of life culminate in an utterance of belief in a Last Judgement?” he asks rhetorically (LC, p. 58).

So, Wittgenstein's view about reasons for religious beliefs has two aspects, one of which is about how religious beliefs are formed, while the other is about how they are justified. Concerning the first, he does not think that religious beliefs are produced by evidence or arguments, but (at least in some cases) by experiences, such as “sufferings of various sorts.” “Experiences, thoughts, – life [he says] can force this concept on us.” (Notice that he is again here thinking of the formation of belief as the internalization of concepts.) Concerning the second, he holds that most religious beliefs are simply not subject to rational assessment. As Jacques Bouveresse put it, for Wittgenstein religious belief “bears a closer resemblance to an affair of the heart than to a rational matter” (see Bouveresse 1995, p. 19). This does not mean that faith is something reason is powerless to influence; but rather, that it is something reason has no bearing on. Wittgenstein does not exclude legitimate criticism of religion altogether. For example, he criticizes the scapegoat ritual described in *Leviticus* (16:20–22) on the grounds that it embodies a confused conception of guilt and responsibility, a “false mythology,” as he puts it (PO, p. 197), and he clearly believes that genuine faith can be mixed with superstition in a believer's mind. But the immunity from rational assessment Wittgenstein grants to religious beliefs does extend to Christian beliefs about the life of Jesus:

Christianity is not based on a historical truth; rather, it offers us a (historical) narrative and says: now believe! But not, believe this narrative with the belief appropriate to a historical narrative, rather: believe through thick and thin, which you can only do as a result of a life. *Here you have a narrative, don't take the same attitude to it as you take to other historical narratives. Make a quite different place in your life for it. – There is nothing paradoxical about that!* (CV, p. 32, 1937)

Queer as it sounds: the historical accounts of the Gospels might, in the historical sense, be demonstrably false, & yet belief would lose nothing through this ... because historical proof (the historical proof-game) is irrelevant to belief. (CV, pp. 37f., 1937)

## 5

Is Wittgenstein's account of religious belief convincing? I doubt whether it is. First, a religious belief is surely not like a passionate commitment to a system of reference. It is true that believing God exists is very unlike believing a hypothesis in history or in science, and the differences have to do *inter alia* with the ways in which we may be led to believe that God exists, and the ways in which this belief will influence our other beliefs and our feelings, commitments, and actions. But it does not follow that believing God exists is itself like a passionate commitment. There is no doubt that the expression of a religious belief can often convey such a commitment; but we should not infer that this is all it signifies, any more than we should infer from the fact that a moral judgment may convey admiration or disgust that this is all it signifies. This reductive view of moral judgments appealed to some philosophers during the heyday of verificationism, but it does not carry conviction. Furthermore, if I have and retain this kind of passionate commitment, my belief that God exists will typically be part of my *reason* for doing so.

The last point has been contested, on the grounds that it "[presupposes that] adopting a religious form of life is a secondary consequence of a logically prior and logically independent existential belief ... which simply begs the question against Wittgenstein's whole approach" (Mulhall 2001, p. 101). But this remark confuses the two questions about reasons I distinguished earlier, the question of how religious beliefs are formed, and the question of how they are justified. For if we say that the belief that God exists is typically part of a person's reason for *having* and *retaining* the kind of passionate commitment Wittgenstein refers to, this does not mean that people typically enter into a religious form of life as a "secondary consequence" of coming to believe that God exists: it means that the belief that God exists typically sustains this passionate commitment by justifying it, at least in the individual's own eyes. We should not rule out *a priori* the idea that someone might enter into a religious form of life as a result of coming to believe that God exists. This is not an impossible sequence of events. But the criticism of Wittgenstein's equation between belief and a passionate commitment does not depend on the assumption that it occurs.

Is Wittgenstein's account of the difference between the belief that there will be a last judgment and a prediction, or between the proposition that God exists and an existential proposition in science or history, convincing? Again, surely not. He is right, I think, to insist that there are many different kinds of existential propositions. Belief in God's existence is a different sort of existential belief from the belief that there are infinitely many primes, or the belief that there is a planet between Neptune and Pluto. But one good way of understanding the differences between these propositions is to consider the different ways in which they are proved or supported. And since evidence and argument are not the exclusive property of science, it cannot be right to insist that if we try to prove or support the proposition that God exists we are already trapped in confusion,



because we are treating religion as if it were science. It would, for example, be quite unconvincing to maintain that Anselm and Aquinas were peddling superstitions, or that apostasy cannot be based on reasons.

Is Wittgenstein right to insulate religious beliefs from “the historical proof-game?” I doubt it. It certainly is not possible to insulate religion entirely from rational criticism: “If Christ be not risen, our faith is vain” implies “Either Christ is risen or our faith is vain” for exactly the same reason as “If the weather is not fine, our picnic is ruined” implies “Either the weather is fine or our picnic is ruined.” But if religious beliefs and systems of religious beliefs are not invulnerable to logic, why should they be cocooned from other sorts of rational scrutiny? Furthermore, religious beliefs are not all alike. Thus, the belief that the Son of God was crucified and the belief that Jesus was the Son of God may not be answerable to historical evidence in exactly the same way. It is a weakness in Wittgenstein’s treatment of this subject that he does not consider the substantial differences between religious beliefs, and makes blanket claims about “religious discourse,” as if this were a uniform phenomenon, when in fact it is very diverse.

Finally, is Wittgenstein right to insist that religious faith is not so much a matter of assenting to a series of doctrines as cleaving to a form of life? It seems to me that there isn’t a right answer to this question. There are different conceptions of faith in the Christian tradition, and I doubt whether it is sensible to say whether they are right or wrong. (“Here one can only describe and say: this is what human life is like.”) However, we *can* say that nothing in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy of language, and in particular no part of his doctrine about the relation between language and forms of life, implies that a form of life cannot involve historical or metaphysical beliefs (such as that Jesus rose from the dead or that the soul is immortal) as well as concepts and attitudes: all of them – beliefs, concepts, and attitudes – in a mutually supporting relation. Nor does it imply that the beliefs which form part of the core of a form of life cannot include false or incoherent ones.

Are history and philosophy therefore capable of demonstrating that traditional Christianity is worthless, or that “people do all of this out of sheer stupidity?” (GB, p. 119). Not at all. For if the gospels are demonstrably false and no coherent formulation of the central Christian doctrines is possible, it does not follow that Christianity is either stupid or worthless. The Stoic doctrine of preferred indifferents may be incoherent, and the doctrine that forms are material certainly is. But it would be a gross mistake to infer that Stoicism was a stupid or worthless system. Incoherence is a defect in a system of religious beliefs because if one can *see* that a doctrine is incoherent, that is a compelling reason to disbelieve it. But philosophers, who have a professional interest in coherence and consistency, are prone to exaggerate their importance in human life.

## 6

Let us return now to the question I raised when we began to look at Wittgenstein’s later philosophy. I said that Wittgenstein’s radical interpretation of the sentences in which we express religious beliefs is an application of a powerful strategy, which he also pursues in the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of mathematics. The question is why this strategy fails where religious belief is concerned, when it is so fruitful in these



other areas. Consider, for example, what Wittgenstein says about how we can come to believe that God exists: "Experiences, thoughts – life can force this concept on us." He does not really regard the belief that God exists as an existential belief at all, any more than he regards the belief that there will be a last judgment as a prediction. Indeed a remark recorded in 1949 comes close to saying this explicitly:

God's essence is supposed to guarantee his existence – what this really means is that what is here at issue is not the existence of something [*dass es sich hier um eine Existenz nicht handelt*]. (CV, p. 82, 1949)

Why should Wittgenstein's view, that when someone expresses the belief that God exists, they are in reality expressing a passionate commitment to a system of reference, rather than making a metaphysical existence claim, turn out to be so implausible?

The most obvious thought is that this is not what religious believers *say* they are doing, with the exception of a very small number of professional philosophers who have been convinced by Wittgenstein's remarks, and surely we ought to respect the believer's own account of what he himself or she herself believes. But we find a bold riposte to this observation in the literature on this subject:

This suggestion is baffling. These philosophers [i.e., the ones who make this suggestion] would not dream of advocating this procedure elsewhere in philosophy. I can be told any day of the week in my local pub that thinking is a state of consciousness. Does that settle the matter? (Phillips 1994, p. 108)

According to D. Z. Phillips, the author of this remark, the religious believer who says that his belief that God exists is a metaphysical belief, which really does concern the existence of something, should be treated in the same way as the mathematician who is a Platonist or – in Phillips's own example – the man in my local pub who has a firm grasp of the difference between thinking and drinking, but a confused idea about what thinking is.

Phillips' riposte is quite unconvincing. The religious believer's interpretation of his own beliefs is not analogous to the mathematician's philosophy of mathematics or the man in the pub's philosophy of mind, because the religious believer is not making a philosophical claim about God, such as that his essence guarantees his existence. He is simply explaining what he believes. But on this matter, with certain reservations that do not affect the problem we are concerned with, he is authoritative. We have no more reason to contradict him than we have to contradict the mathematician who insists that he is a Platonist, or the man in the pub who confesses that he is a Cartesian.

However, by the same token, we have no reason to contest Wittgenstein's account of the conception of faith he found attractive. Broadly speaking, there are three conceptions of faith in the Christian tradition: the Thomist conception, the Lutheran conception, and the Kierkegaardian conception. Simplifying somewhat, Thomist faith consists in believing that certain metaphysical and historical propositions are true, Lutheran faith combines this with trust in the living God, and Kierkegaardian faith is simply trust in the living God. It was the last of these conceptions of faith that attracted Wittgenstein: "Religious faith and superstition are quite different," he wrote. "One of them results from *fear* and is a sort of false science. The other is a trusting" (CV, p. 72, 1948).

It is an interesting question why a conception of faith freed from historical and meta-physical beliefs arose in the Christian tradition. Richard Swinburne offers an interesting suggestion:

The post-Renaissance centuries saw the emergence and steady growth, among intellectuals to start with and then more widely, of a vast pool of 'agnostics' ... [from among whom] we hear the great cry of 'I would like to believe, but unfortunately I cannot.' It was, I suspect, partly as a reaction to this situation, that some men developed an understanding of faith which did not involve any belief that the propositions of the Creed were true. (Swinburne 2005, p. 123)

This is certainly a plausible hypothesis, where Wittgenstein is concerned. For it does seem that "the great cry of 'I would like to believe, but unfortunately I cannot'" lies behind his intense desire to protect a faith he found he could not share, together with the more purely intellectual motivations that shape his lectures and remarks about religion.

As we have seen, Wittgenstein's explicit aims are to describe the role that religious concepts – concepts such as sin, redemption, judgment, grace, and atonement – can play in an individual's or a community's way of life; to show how we can resist assimilating the use of these concepts to hypotheses, predictions, and theoretical explanations; and thereby to protect Christian faith from the various positivist lines of attack to which it was exposed – in particular, that it relies on metaphysical confusion, scientific error, or historical falsehood. I have argued that Wittgenstein is unsuccessful in these aims. Perhaps his writings on this subject are best interpreted, not as a contribution to the philosophy of religion, but as the record of a philosopher's personal understanding of religious faith.

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## Thomism

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### The Leonine Revival

The modern history of Thomism may be said to begin with the appearance of Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris* in August 1879. Thomas Aquinas, who was not mentioned until the midpoint of the papal document, was taken to be representative of a style of philosophy – an alternate title of the encyclical was *On Christian Philosophy* – and not the unique instance of that style. But if Albert the Great and Bonaventure, as well as many of the Fathers, were cited, the thought of Thomas was said to epitomize the best of the best, such that in studying him one received the benefit of all the others (see Chapter 9, The Christian Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology). Leo clearly regarded Thomas himself as a veritable summa of the perennial philosophy, a phrase appropriated by the Thomistic revival. And Leo's successors, notably Pius X, Pius XI, and Pius XII, lent their authority to Thomas almost to the exclusion of other Christian teachers.

During his lifetime (1225–74), immediately after his death, and throughout the intervening centuries, Thomas Aquinas had as many opponents as he had followers. As a newly installed Dominican Master of Theology, he found himself in a fierce battle at the University of Paris, defending the propriety of mendicant monks holding university professorships. His appropriation of Aristotle was to make him a target of Franciscan criticism, including that of Bonaventure, when the controversy over Latin Averroism heated up. And, among the 219 propositions condemned in 1277, three years after the death of Thomas, by a commission appointed by the bishop of Paris, are to be found a number of Thomistic tenets. The dispute over Aristotle, actually a dispute over Avicennian and Averroistic interpretations of Aristotle, dominated Thomas's second regency at Paris (1269–72). Its lasting effect was to establish a rivalry between the Dominicans and Franciscans, with Thomas functioning as the paladin of his order, and John Duns Scotus (and other Franciscans) opposing him. During what has been called Second Scholasticism, which took place after the Reformation and was largely an Iberian phenomenon, the Jesuits became the preferred opponents of Thomists, who were usually Dominicans. It would be quite wrong, accordingly, to imagine that Thomas enjoyed an intellectual hegemony in European universities prior to the Reform, or indeed after it among Catholics. The Thomistic revival initiated by Leo XIII was thus

in many ways a genuine innovation, according Thomas a status he had not hitherto enjoyed.

What was the motivation for *Aeterni Patris*? The underlying assumption of the encyclical was that dominant philosophical positions of the day were false and pernicious. Errors about human nature and destiny, about the criteria for moral evaluation, and about the ontological status of the physical world might seem to be matters best left to the interchange among professional philosophers. And it is well known that wherever two philosophers are gathered together, there are at least three different views. Leo's sense of urgency is explained as much by the practical, social, and political, as by the theoretical effects of the philosophical positions to which he objects. On the level of theory, if certain dominant philosophical positions were true, then Christianity is false, an inconceivable upshot for a rational believer. The papal presupposition is a straightforward instance of a simple argument: if Christianity is true, modern views of man, morals, and the universe are false; but Christianity is true; therefore those positions of modern philosophy are false. Leo was writing at a time when the agnostic, even atheist, philosopher was no longer a rarity, and he could not expect his argument to carry weight with the non-believer. Nor, however impeccably logical, would a believing philosopher call Leo's argument a philosophical one. That is why Leo appealed to Christian philosophers to confront the offending doctrines on a philosophical basis. Proving them false would not, of course, establish the truth of Christianity, but it would remove an impediment to seeing acceptance of the faith as reasonable.

While such philosophers as Josiah Royce welcomed *Aeterni Patris*, the papal recommendation of the thought of Thomas Aquinas had a largely intramural effect, certainly during what might be called the first phase of the Thomist revival. This was the period extending from the late nineteenth century to World War I, during which new colleges and institutes, new associations and academies, as well as new journals and publications proliferated throughout the world. First-order scholarship was soon translated into digests and manuals, so that the thought of Thomas could be taught in seminaries and colleges. L'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie at historic Louvain, founded by the eventual Cardinal Mercier, was one of the most noteworthy factors in this first phase. The religious orders, the Dominicans and the Jesuits, even the Franciscans, responded with enthusiasm to *Aeterni Patris*. There was an unsurprising symbiosis between the rise of medieval studies and the Thomistic revival. The task Leo assigned his reader was twofold. First, to assimilate what Thomas had taught, and this entailed placing him within intellectual history, and, second, to show the relevance of his thought to the modern problematic.

### Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson

If there was an undeniably clerical cast to the first phase of the Thomistic revival, its second phase – from World War I to the Second Vatican Council, which opened in 1962 – was defined by laymen, most notably Jacques Maritain (1882–1973) and Etienne Gilson (1884–1978). Both men were French, both attended the famous Lycee Henri IV in Paris, both were prolific writers whose influence in North America was solidified by long sojourns in the New World, and both lived into their nineties. In their published

correspondence is a letter from Gilson written late in life, after the death of Maritain, in which he said that he had finally grasped the difference between Maritain and himself. I, Gilson said, have spent my life seeking as accurate a knowledge as possible of what Thomas Aquinas actually taught. Maritain, on the other hand, sought to replicate in the twentieth century what Thomas had done in the thirteenth (Gilson/Maritain 1991, pp. 275–6).

Catchy as this comparison is, it is not fair to either man. Some of Gilson's most influential books were philosophical rather than historical, and Maritain was a close and careful reader of the text of Thomas. But Gilson's remark indicates the dual character of Thomism – and perhaps of any philosophical school. There must be the painstaking assimilation of the texts of the master, followed by the addressing of current issues in the light of the doctrine learned. Kantians, Platonists, and Hegelians have similarly double tasks. It is the rare thinker who achieves excellence in both.

Maritain, after completing his university studies in Paris, where he followed Henri Bergson's lectures avidly, went on to study biology for two years at Heidelberg. His conversion to Catholicism in 1906 led to an interest in the thought of Aquinas, whom he studied alone and with a Dominican tutor. Enthralled by the *Summa Theologiae*, he devoured the writings of Thomas as well as those of the great Thomistic commentators, Cajetan, John of St. Thomas, the Salmanticenses. His first philosophical paper was "Reason and Modern Science" (1910). He became a professor of philosophy at the Lycee Stanislas in 1913, wrote a book on Bergson's philosophy, then joined the faculty of the Institut Catholique in Paris and, with *Art and Scholasticism* (1920), began a series of books which conveyed a Thomist philosophical perspective. In 1932 he published both *The Dream of Descartes* and his masterpiece, *The Degrees of Knowledge*. The latter was the most influential twentieth-century rethinking of the thought of Aquinas, extended into areas and problems undreamt of by Thomas himself.

The first part deals with philosophy and experimental science, critical realism, philosophy of nature, and metaphysics. The second treats of "suprarational knowledge" and begins with a distinction between three wisdoms, metaphysics, theology, and mysticism, and then, after a discussion of grace, turns to Augustine and John of the Cross. While developing and defending the distinction between philosophy and theology, the *Degrees* makes it clear that Thomism in the full sense of the term comprises both. Not until the posthumous publication of Edith Stein's *Endliches und Ewiges Sein* in 1962 did Maritain's comprehensive effort to rethink Thomism have a counterpart. While in good measure an autodidact as a Thomist, Maritain was considerably more comfortable in the philosophical movement of which he was a leader than was Gilson.

Etienne Gilson studied under Emile Durkheim and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, as well as Bergson, and wrote two dissertations on Descartes that were fateful for his future work. The investigation of the relation between Descartes and the scholasticism he professed to have put behind him, and a compilation of medieval texts which clarified the Cartesian, ignited Gilson's interest in the Middle Ages. When, after teaching in various lycées, he became a university professor, first at Lille, then at Strasbourg, and finally at the Sorbonne, he offered a course in Thomas Aquinas which would become *Le Thomisme*, first published in 1920. The subsequent editions of this work provide the best record of the development of Gilson's thought. Books on Bonaventure, Scotus, and Augustine followed. Far more of a university man than Maritain, eventually a member of the

French Academy, Gifford lecturer, wooed by Harvard, where he briefly taught, founder of the prestigious series *Etudes de Philosophie Médiévale*, Gilson was oddly unclubbable. He was a severe critic of his fellow Thomists, as his letters to Henri de Lubac reveal, and far less amenable to the *magisterium* of the Church than was Maritain. Pius X, who condemned modernism, made Gilson feel downright unorthodox, though he was always a fervent Catholic (Shook 1984, pp. 66–7).

## Realism

The fundamental issue of the Thomism of Gilson and Maritain, as indeed it had been of the first phase of the Thomist revival, was epistemological: Is the human mind capable of knowing things as they are? Modern philosophy is rightly thought to begin when Descartes gave primacy to the question of the objective reference of ideas and judgments. All judgments about the sensible world as well as about mathematics were susceptible to a doubt that is only removed by the conjunction of the *Cogito* and a proof for the existence of God, the latter based on the claim that only the idea of God *requires* an extra-mental counterpart. Modern philosophy is in many ways the story of variations on the theme of the justification of knowledge. Increasingly, what is known came to be seen as a product of the knower, bearing on phenomena, not noumena, until, with Hegel, the noumenal is seen to be idle and discarded; the dichotomy of thought and being thereby disappears. When the theistic context of modern philosophy fades away, a Protagorean epistemology begins to emerge: the human mind is the measure. This is a rough sketch of what Leo wished to counter by a renewal of the kind of philosophy represented by Thomas.

Thomism as a realism – that is the central claim. At the University of Louvain, Cardinal Mercier seemed to accept the claim that the justification of knowledge is the first philosophical question, and the critical realism of M. Noel and others continued that. This became the target of Gilson's attack. Gilson rejected the suggestion that realism had to be established critically, since he took this to concede the point contested. Maritain sided with Gilson, but was less critical of the Louvain school, as is clear from his treatment of the matter in his *chef d'oeuvre*, *The Degrees of Knowledge*.

During the first phase of the Thomist revival, there was much talk of Aristotelico-Thomism. The suggestion was that, on the philosophical plane, Thomism was equivalent to Aristotelianism, and vice versa. In the 1930s, the work of C. Fabro and L. M. Geiger called attention to the overlooked Platonic elements in Thomas, citing the pervasiveness of the concept of participation in Thomas' writings. At much the same time, a holograph of Thomas' commentary of Boethius' *De Trinitate* drew renewed attention to Thomas' doctrine that, while essence and existence are of course distinct in creatures, in God, and in God alone, they are identical. This "sublime teaching" (*haec sublimis veritas*), conveyed by God's self-description in Genesis as "He Who Is," became for Gilson the *clef de voûte* of Thomas' thought. Under his influence, Thomists spoke of the differences between Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. Gilson's strongest statement of the antipathy between Thomas and Aristotle is found in *Being and Some Philosophers* (1949).



During World War II, the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies at Toronto, which had been founded by Gilson and included Maritain on its visiting staff, as well as the Faculte de Philosophie at Laval in Quebec, attracted many North American students. The School of Philosophy at the Catholic University of America, as well as some graduate programs at Jesuit universities, contributed to the emergence of a Thomism that was more historically sophisticated and engaged in contemporary philosophical discussions. The schizophrenia endemic to any philosophical school – accurate assimilation of texts, application to contemporary problems – brought about changes. For example, after World War II, Louvain became the repository of the Edmund Husserl papers; there was also great interest in such contemporaries as Maurice Merleau-Ponty. More and more courses were offered in Thomistic interpretations of contemporary philosophy and with correspondingly less emphasis on courses aimed at the foundational texts of the tradition. Eventually, the study of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty would lose all pretense of a Thomistic critique and/or assimilation.

## Philosophy and Science

The issue which rivaled epistemology in importance during the second phase of the Thomist revival was philosophy of science. Thomas' thought is unintelligible apart from the Aristotelian hylomorphic analysis of natural things: the products of change – *ta physika, naturalia* – are compounds of matter and form. Chief among the Aristotelian causes is the end or *telos*, and for Thomas too the final cause is *causa causarum*: the cause of the other causes. Thomas' whole philosophy reposes on the validity of this analysis of change. But has not all that been rendered obsolete by modern science? Theories were developed to show the compatibility of Thomism and modern science. At Louvain, the tendency was to say that natural philosophy (the locus of hylomorphism) was a branch of metaphysics, the product of a different kind of knowing than the scientific. Other Thomists objected that hylomorphism was presupposed by, not a product of, metaphysics. Their question was: what is the relationship between a philosophy of nature and mathematical physics? Maritain's theory dominated and was either accepted or modified by most Thomists, with significant criticisms of it coming from Charles De Koninck at Laval and the Dominicans of the Albertus Magnus Lyceum at River Forest. Most Thomists agreed that the very possibility of the continued relevance of Thomas' philosophy depended upon the successful resolution of the problem posed by modern physics.

## Vatican II

In 1960 a new pope, John XXIII, decided to convene an ecumenical council, the twentieth in the history of the Church. Vatican II, as it was called, met in four sessions from 1962 to 1965. It was the central event for Roman Catholicism in the twentieth century. Mention of it is relevant here, because Vatican II was widely taken to be the end of the Thomist revival and the embrace of philosophical pluralism. Philosophers who had

been Thomists now declared themselves to be something else, usually phenomenologists, more rarely analytic philosophers. The thought behind this pluralism was that, just as Thomas had assimilated the dominant Aristotelianism of his time, so contemporary Catholics were to put to the service of the faith the dominant philosophy of the day. Since there was no such dominant philosophy, a pluralism resulted with a somewhat relativistic meta-theory which held that Christians could come to terms with any philosophy.

As a result, for a quarter of a century, only a minority of Catholic intellectuals devoted themselves to a study of Thomas Aquinas. The sense that one who was both Catholic and a philosopher should know Thomas well became attenuated. Issues and arguments that had reached the peak of interest suddenly seemed to drop off the radar screen. Those who said that Thomas had been dethroned were able to marshal a good deal of evidence for their claim.

What could not be maintained, however, was that the council itself had dethroned Thomas. His role as principal philosophical and theological mentor of Catholics was in fact reiterated and ever since papal recommendations on the order of *Aeterni Patris* have continued unabated. Moreover, consultation of the international bibliographies of scholarly work on the thought of Aquinas reveals an unbroken flood of entries. The observance of the seven hundredth anniversary of the death of Thomas in 1974 inspired interest in the history of the Thomist revival. The Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas publishes several series of such historical studies. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that Thomas ceased to function in the curricula of Catholic colleges and universities as he had before Vatican II. This has had the interesting consequence of releasing Thomas into the wider philosophical world. Once Mortimer Adler had to explain that his interest in Aquinas was not a prelude to conversion. Now work in Thomas goes on in secular as well as Catholic universities, underscoring the truth of one of Leo XIII's fundamental assumptions, namely that Thomism can compete well as a philosophy. The works of such giants of the golden years of the Thomist revival as Maritain and Gilson continue to exert their influence; there are many national as well as two international Maritain associations and several editions of collected works. The *Index Thomisticus* and the *PastMaster* album have made the writings of Thomas himself available on compact disc in Latin and English, respectively. Whatever form the Thomism of the future takes, it will doubtless differ from the Leonine revival, while owing much to its achievements.

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## Natural Theology

BRIAN HEBBLETHWAITE

Natural theology may be defined as rational inquiry into the claim of theism to offer the best explanation for the existence and nature of our world and for our own existence and experience. Natural theology appeals to arguments and considerations open to all, irrespective of any particular religious tradition, and irrespective of any special revelation claim. It should not be equated with apologetics, since natural theology may be explored simply out of philosophical interest or for its supportive role within the circle of faith. Moreover, apologetics may include appeal to the rational, moral, and religious power of specific revelation claims as well. Nor should natural theology be equated with fundamental theology, as though Christian belief, for example, has to be built up on the foundation of theistic metaphysics before ever the doctrines of the creed can take over (see Chapter 13, Early Modern Philosophical Theology in Great Britain and Chapter 12, Early Modern Philosophical Theology on the Continent).

That the arguments in natural theology of Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa contra Gentiles*, are still worth pondering is demonstrated by Norman Kretzmann's last two books, *The Metaphysics of Theism* (1997) and *The Metaphysics of Creation* (1999). And although the arguments of the Cambridge Platonists in the seventeenth century and those of Joseph Butler and William Paley in the eighteenth century suffered severe criticism at the hands of Hume and Kant, it is remarkable how natural theology has continued to flourish in the twentieth century and beyond, not least through the ongoing Gifford Lectures.

### The Gifford Lectures

Lord Gifford's will (1885) bequeathed £80,000 for establishing lectureships in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, and St. Andrews for "promoting, advancing, teaching, and diffusing the study of Natural Theology in the widest sense of that term." Since the first series in 1888 over 220 lecturers, including the most prominent anthropologists, philosophers, and theologians of the Western world, have delivered Gifford Lectures in one of the four ancient Scottish universities. A selection of twentieth-century examples will illustrate the range of approaches to what is claimed to be some natural knowledge of God.

## Metaphysical Approaches

C. C. J. Webb (1865–1964), first holder of the Oriel (subsequently Nolloth) Professorship of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion in the University of Oxford, published his Gifford Lectures as *God and Personality* (1919) and *Divine Personality and Human Life* (1920). These works are informed by profound conviction of the reality of God, of personality in God, and of personal relation in God. In this he exemplifies the school of Personal Idealism, moving away from the Absolute Idealism of Bradley and Bosanquet, both of whom had themselves given Gifford Lectures in the early years of the twentieth century.

William Temple (1881–1944), Archbishop of Canterbury for the last two years of his life, was that century's paradigm of a scholarly Anglican bishop. In his *Nature, Man and God* (1934), he developed a powerful evolutionary natural theology, arguing that the process that has led to the emergence of mind and spirit here on earth should be evaluated in terms of its highest product. This "dialectical realism," as Temple calls it, suggests a transcendent God as its source and principle of unity – a transcendence that requires at the same time divine immanence throughout the whole world.

In *The Openness of Being* (1971), Eric Mascall (1905–1993) returned to the theme of his earlier works, *He Who Is* (1943) and *Existence and Analogy* (1949), namely, the question of metaphysical approaches to natural theology. Surveying recent work in this field, Mascall took the opportunity to introduce to British readers the so-called transcendental Thomism of Karl Rahner, Emerich Coreth, and Bernard Lonergan (see Roman Catholic approaches below), as well as defending again his own realist metaphysic and objective doctrine of truth (see Chapter 20, Thomism). The book concludes with a persuasive account of the "openness" of finite being and especially of human nature to the new creative activity of God, but at the same time with a highly traditional defense of God's changelessness and non-temporality. The coherence of these positions may well be questioned.

## Moral Approaches

The moral approach in natural theology is exemplified by A. E. Taylor (1869–1945), professor of moral philosophy at Edinburgh from 1924 to 1941. In *The Faith of a Moralist* (1930) he argues that morality points beyond itself to an eternal good – to God, to divine grace, and to immortality. But Taylor had already provided a wider defense of theistic metaphysics in the article "Theism," which he contributed to the *Hastings Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* in 1921; later he was to offer a version of the teleological argument in *Does God Exist?* (1945). So, in Taylor's case, the moral argument is embedded in a wider natural theology.

Donald MacKinnon (1913–94), Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity at Cambridge from 1960 to 1978, gave the Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh in 1964–6. A much reduced version was published as *The Problem of Metaphysics* (1974). MacKinnon's profound reflections on the themes of parable and tragedy as windows into the transcendent exemplify again, primarily, a moral approach to natural theology. At the same time, they too show that moral approaches cannot be divorced from metaphysical approaches. The same is true of anthropological approaches.

## Anthropological Approaches

The American pragmatist philosopher William James (1842–1910) gave the Gifford Lectures at the very beginning of the twentieth century (see Chapter 15, American Pragmatism). *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study of Human Nature* (1902) exemplifies an anthropological, mainly psychological, approach to the question of transcendence, investigating diverse, but recurring forms of religious experience (see Chapter 48, Religious Experience). The resulting “piecemeal supernaturalism” remains extremely vague.

John Macquarrie (1919–2007), Lady Margaret Professor at Oxford from 1970 to 1986, made a distinctive contribution to natural theology in his use of both existentialism and ontology in making the case for a theistic, or perhaps panentheistic, view of the world. *In Search of Humanity* (1982) and his Gifford Lectures, *In Search of Deity* (1984), exemplify this basically anthropological approach. Humanity’s freedom and creativity point to a spiritual source transcending the world out of which we have evolved.

## Approaches from the History of Religions

Nathan Soderblom (1866–1931), bishop of Uppsala, in *The Living God: Basal Forms of Personal Religion* (1933), provided a masterly survey of the main types of religion in world history. On his deathbed, with reference to these lectures not actually published until after his death he said, “There is a living God. I can prove it by the history of religions.”

Ninian Smart (1927–2001), for many years professor of religious studies at Lancaster and at Santa Barbara, outlined in his Gifford Lectures, *Beyond Ideology* (1981), what he called a “transcendental humanism,” drawing on the complementary traditions of Christianity and Buddhism, that might, hopefully, embrace “tamed versions” of more hard-line ideologies, in the interests of “the humane development of the global city.” The element of natural theology in this vision may be discerned in Smart’s claim that “the sorrows and happinesses of humans, the quest for identity in individual and in group, are illuminated by what lies Beyond, whether looked at from the angle of the Christian tradition or from the Eastern and Buddhist tradition” (Smart 1981, p. 14).

A still more pluralistic understanding of the history of religions can be found in the Gifford Lectures of John Hick (b. 1922). His *An Interpretation of Religion* (1989) is subtitled “Human Responses to the Transcendent,” and it is his many-sided defense of this way of looking at the history of religions that makes this book a classic of natural theology. As in other writings, Hick’s chief appeal is to the different forms of religious experience.

## Approaches from Natural Science

Popular misconceptions over the alleged conflict between science and religion are decisively refuted in the Gifford Lectures of Arthur Peacocke (1924–2006) and John Polkinghorne (b. 1930), each of whom was also winner of the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion.

Peacocke's Giffords form part 3 of the enlarged edition of his *Theology for a Scientific Age* (1993). In chapter 12 of that book, Peacocke, originally a biologist, argues that the many-levelled nature of humanity, each level being the subject of the appropriate natural or human science, is not only consistent with a wider cultural perspective on humanity, but also with a religious, indeed theological, perspective. Evolution, in this view, far from being the enemy of religion, is, to use the title of Peacocke's later collection of essays, "the disguised friend of faith."

Polkinghorne's Gifford Lecture's appeared as *Science and Christian Belief* (1994). Originally a mathematical physicist, Polkinghorne argued in those lectures that natural theology should be thought of as an integral part of all theology. Christian systematic theology is enhanced by recognition from the side of physical science that the universe is not self-explanatory. He acknowledges, too, the further point that music and art yield intimations of transcendence.

### Anglican Voices

Natural theology has long been held to be characteristic of the Anglican tradition. Among the Gifford lecturers mentioned above, Webb, Taylor, Temple, Mascall, Macquarrie, MacKinnon, Smart, Peacocke, and Polkinghorne were all Anglicans. Other Anglican voices include the following:

Hastings Rashdall (1858–1924), fellow of New College, Oxford, and later Dean of Carlisle, was primarily a moral philosopher and moral theologian. But the theistic philosophy underlying and informing these positions can be discerned in Rashdall's contributions to two symposia, *Contentio Veritatis* (1902) and *Personal Idealism* (ed. H. Sturt, 1902). In the former, "The Ultimate Basis of Theism," he advances a characteristically idealist proof of God's existence (along the lines of Bishop Berkeley's arguments), and in the latter, "Personality, Human and Divine," he suggests that it is God alone who satisfies, without qualification, the criteria of personality, namely, consciousness, unity, self-identity, and individual agency (see Chapter 46, Arguments from Consciousness and Free Will).

F. R. Tennant (1866–1957), fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, and at times a country clergyman, was perhaps the most distinguished Anglican philosopher of religion between the two world wars. His major work, the two-volume *Philosophical Theology* (1928 and 1930), is still read as a fine example of cumulative reasoning in defense of a teleological view of the world. Its chapter on the problem of evil is a classic of theodicy, and its treatment of the relation between religion and science foreshadows much later Anglican apologetic. In Tennant's case, the moral argument for God is only the culmination of the cumulative case, which proceeds by reflection both on nature's capacity for evolution and on what has evolved over time.

I. T. Ramsey (1915–72), the third holder of the Nolloth Chair at Oxford and later bishop of Durham, was indefatigable in his attempt to defend and explain the meaningfulness of religious language in face of the challenges of hard-line empiricism (see Chapter 41, Religious Language). In books such as *Religious Language* (1957), *Models and Mystery* (1964), *Christian Discourse* (1965), and *Models for Divine Activity* (1973), Ramsey endeavored to show how talk of God was rooted in experience of the world of science and of human life, yet went beyond it as dimensions of depth and transcendence



in that world are revealed to the believer. Ramsey elaborated many examples of such “disclosure situations,” where models drawn from the empirical world are qualified in such a way as to open up these dimensions. For Ramsey, the traditional proofs of the existence of God are not so much arguments as techniques for evoking disclosures of God.

The most significant Anglican philosophical theologian of the twentieth century was Austin Farrer (1904–68), for many years fellow and chaplain of Trinity College, Oxford, and subsequently warden of Keble College. His first main work, *Finite and Infinite* (1943), was a fresh and sustained presentation of theistic metaphysics, worked out in explicit response to positivist criticism, using as its starting point a detailed analysis of human subjectivity and human agency. Farrer came to think, however, that his characterization, in that book, of the infinite pole of the finite/infinite relation had been, in the Aristotelian manner of the Thomists, too absolutist. In his last book, *Faith and Speculation* (1967), Farrer’s theology of God is thought through wholly in voluntarist terms. God exists as the supreme agent and will, actively engaged in providence and grace, entering into creaturely temporality – but without being subsumed within creaturely categories themselves. Farrer insisted to the end, against Whitehead and the process theology (see Chapter 17, Process Theology) derived from him, on the “prior actuality of God,” and, indeed, was prepared to spell this out in Trinitarian terms.

Basil Mitchell (b. 1917) held the Nolloth Chair at Oxford from 1969 to 1984. He is best known for his book, *The Justification of Religious Belief* (1973), in which he developed and popularized the notion of a cumulative case for a theistic interpretation of the world – that is to say, the patient building up of considerations which, together, may be seen to support the conclusion like the several legs of a chair. Mitchell, unlike his successor, sees this as an informal kind of probabilistic reasoning, comparable to the kind of argumentation one finds in law or history, much depending on the skill and judiciousness of the reasoner.

Richard Swinburne (b. 1934), now a member of the Eastern Orthodox Church (although for most of his life an Anglican), held the Nolloth Chair from 1985 to 2002. He made a major contribution to natural theology in *The Existence of God* (1979) and, at a more popular level, in *Is There a God?* (1996). His approach is comparable to that of Mitchell, but is much more formal, employing a technical theorem in modern probability theory (Bayes’ theorem) to work out the degree of confirmation given to theistic belief by the theistic arguments taken separately and together. Interestingly, he concludes that only when taken together and in connection with the appeal to religious experience do the arguments render it more probable than not that God exists.

Among American Episcopalians, William Alston’s (1921–2009), major study in the epistemology of religion, *Perceiving God* (1991), includes a quintessentially Anglican sympathy for natural theology. “Its death,” he remarks, “has repeatedly been reported, but like the phoenix it keeps rising from the ashes in ever new guises” (p. 289).

## Roman Catholic Approaches

The continuing strength of the Thomist tradition in natural theology has already been mentioned with reference to Kretzmann’s books on the *Summa contra Gentiles*, and can

be further illustrated by reference to Etienne Gilson's (1884–1978) *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (1957) and the first chapter of Brian Davies' (b. 1951) *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil* (2006).

The “transcendental Thomism” which Mascall discussed in his Gifford Lectures represented a more novel, Kantian approach in Roman Catholic natural theology. It is exemplified in the work of Emerich Coreth (1919–2006), professor of christian philosophy at the University of Innsbruck, who, in his book *Metaphysics* (1961, Eng. tr. 1968), attempts to show how the infinite and absolute is presupposed in the existence and activity of all finite being and especially in the thinking and inquiring of all finite spirits.

Similarly, but with more specifically anthropological concentration, Karl Rahner (1904–1984), an Austrian Jesuit who taught at Munich and Münster, argued in *Spirit in the World* (1957, Eng. tr. 1968) that the infinite mystery of God constitutes the precondition of the finite freedom and openness evident in human thought and action.

Bernard Lonergan (1904–84), a Canadian Jesuit scholar who taught in Rome, Toronto, Montreal, and Boston, exemplified, in his book *Insight* (1957), a comparable transcendental method in spelling out the theistic presupposition both of human understanding and of the intelligibility of the world.

## Process Theology

The largely American movement known as process theology, inspired by the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947), includes a strong element of natural theology, as is exemplified in *A Natural Theology for Our Time* (1967) by its leading exponent, Charles Hartshorne (1897–2000), professor of philosophy in Austin, Texas, and in *A Christian Natural Theology* (1965) by John B. Cobb (b. 1925), professor of systematic theology in Claremont, California. Cobb's book is based explicitly on the thought of Whitehead, whose *Process and Reality* (1929) had itself been delivered as Gifford Lectures. Cobb sees Whitehead's comprehensive metaphysic as restoring meaningfulness to the idea of God as well as providing a persuasive conceptuality for the articulation of a Christian worldview open to dialogue with other worldviews such as Buddhism.

## Critics of Natural Theology

Three notable critics of the whole idea of natural theology, Karl Barth, Alvin Plantinga, and Stanley Hauerwas, have themselves, perhaps surprisingly, given Gifford Lectures.

Karl Barth's (1886–1968) opposition to natural theology, set out in his Gifford Lectures, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God* (1938), is better known from his vehement response, “No!,” to Emil Brunner's 1934 pamphlet, *Nature and Grace*. This exchange appeared in English translation as *Natural Theology* in 1946. Barth, the leading Protestant theologian of the twentieth century, argued vehemently that “if one occupies oneself with real theology one can pass by so-called natural theology only as one would pass by an abyss into which it is inadvisable to step if one does not want to

fall.” This view stems, in the first place, from the conviction that saving knowledge of God comes only from God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, and, in the second place, from the Calvinist doctrine of natural man’s, including his reason’s, total depravity. Barth was not opposed to a theology of nature, based on the doctrine of creation, and he acknowledged “other lights” in ethics and religion, but deemed all this knowable only in the light of Christ. None of the writers discussed above would agree with this view and indeed it is hard to see how the limited, supportive role of natural theology in both philosophy and theology can be so categorically dismissed.

Alvin Plantinga (b. 1932), for many years professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, gave the Gifford Lectures in Aberdeen in 1986–7. These were greatly expanded into the three volumes culminating in *Warranted Christian Belief* (2000). Plantinga’s much discussed “Reformed epistemology” (see Chapter 79, *Reformed Epistemology*) holds belief in God to be properly basic for Christians and in need of no defense other than that of negative apologetic, rebutting alleged “defeaters.” For Plantinga, Christian beliefs, formed by properly functioning, God-given faculties, require no further warrant. On the other hand, Plantinga has no objection to theistic arguments as such. As he writes elsewhere, while Christian belief does not depend on theistic arguments, they “can obviously be of value for those who don’t already believe; they can move them closer to belief, and can bring it about that belief in God is at any rate among the live options for them.” And clearly he thinks theistic arguments of great philosophical interest.

Stanley Hauerwas (b. 1940), professor of theological ethics at Duke University, gave the Gifford Lectures in St. Andrews in 2001–2. They were published as *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church’s Witness and Natural Theology* (2001). From a basically Barthian perspective, Hauerwas argues that what he calls “the grain of the universe” is only to be discerned on the basis of Christian faith and practice. For the world’s true nature is revealed in Christ’s way of the Cross and in those who follow that way. For Hauerwas, “natural theology divorced from a full doctrine of God cannot help but distort the character of God and, accordingly, of the world in which we find ourselves.” But this does not necessarily follow. Maybe some Gifford lecturers have come up with such distorted views, but most have not suggested that their arguments yield a doctrine of God at all. The theistic arguments are simply held to point in the direction of something more than naturalism, or at most to provide support for a theism which, of course, requires much more – from revelation – before “a full doctrine of God” can be achieved. Plantinga’s recognition of a limited supportive role for natural theology is surely to be preferred to Hauerwas’ or Barth’s wholesale rejection.

## Natural Theology and Revealed Theology

That elements of natural theology are far from absent in the biblical tradition was convincingly argued by James Barr (1924–2006) in his Gifford Lectures, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* (1993). Barr also argued for a much closer affinity between natural and revealed theology than had often been supposed, insofar as revealed theology is equally open to rational scrutiny and defense. This thesis, together with that of natural

theology's supportive role, has been developed by, among others, Brian Hebblethwaite in his *In Defence of Christianity* (2005).

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## The Reformed Tradition

NICHOLAS WOLTERSTORFF

One of the most salient features of contemporary philosophy of religion in the Reformed tradition of Christianity is its negative attitude toward natural theology – this negative attitude ranges all the way from indifference to hostility. In this regard, the philosophers of the tradition reflect the dominant attitude of the theologians of the tradition, going all the way back to its most influential founder, John Calvin.

Calvin was of the view that religion is not the invention of religious thinkers or powerful figures, but that the “seed of religion” (*semen religionis*) is located in human nature. He was not entirely consistent in his view as to the structure of that indigenous seed of religion: sometimes he thought of it as the innate belief in the existence of a creating and obligating God; rather more often he thought of it as the innate disposition to believe in the existence of such a God, this disposition being activated especially, though not only, by awareness of design. Calvin was equally convinced, however, that to account for the religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices of human beings, one had to consider more than this theistic component in human nature. One had to consider as well the affections of human beings, along with the beliefs they have acquired by induction into some tradition. And here one finds a truly appalling state of affairs. As a consequence, in some individuals and societies the *semen religionis* becomes what Calvin called “a factory of idols.” In some, it yields a non-theistic form of religiosity. And in some, the workings of the *semen religionis* are suppressed to the extent that overt manifestations of religiosity are entirely absent.

The point is that the actual religious beliefs, attitudes, and practices of human beings are the result of the indigenous *semen religionis* working in conjunction with defective contingencies of attitude and belief. To use theological language: the actual religions and irreligions of human beings are the result of the interplay of our *created* nature with our *fallen* nature. Thus a theology based entirely on the theistic deliverances of our indigenous human nature is an impossibility. We need some criterion for sorting through the confusions, and some cure for our disordered affections. Reason will not do the work; it too is fallen, as intertwined, in its workings, with defects in attitude and conviction as is the *semen religionis*. Only God’s revelation in Jesus Christ and in the Bible, and faith in that revealing God, can save and guide us.

Belief in God does have a “foundation” in human nature; Calvin developed the rudiments of what some contemporary Roman Catholics call “foundational theology.” But

it was a foundational theology developed from an explicitly Christian perspective. Calvin thought there was no hope whatsoever of all of us together developing theology just *qua* human beings, no hope of developing a common “natural theology,” thus understood.

That has remained the dominant – though not indeed the exclusive – attitude within the Reformed tradition. The Princeton theologians of the nineteenth century, inspired by “Common Sense” philosophy – itself a product of Scottish Presbyterianism – held out some bit of hope for natural theology. But Karl Barth, the most influential Reformed theologian of the twentieth century, went beyond Calvin by not only insisting on the impossibility of natural theology, but also insisting that there is not even so much as a “contact point” in our human nature for the Christian gospel – nothing in our nature to which the gospel “answers.” Christian belief is a creation of the Spirit. A famous and rather acrimonious dispute erupted between Barth and Emil Brunner on the issue – Brunner being another important contemporary theologian in the Reformed tradition.

Barth had little direct influence on philosophy. There is, in that, a certain historical justice: Barth made clear that in his theology he had little use for philosophy. He regarded philosophical theology as idolatrous; and as to philosophy of religion, he insisted that Christianity is not a religion. Nonetheless, two important theologians of Barthian orientation have produced reflections which, if not strictly philosophical, are certainly on the borderline between theology and philosophy of religion. Thomas F. Torrance, working in Edinburgh, has explored the “interface” between theology and natural science in a good many substantial books. And Hans Frei at Yale, along with his associate, George Lindbeck, has explored hermeneutical issues in some depth.

On the surface, the rejection by the bulk of Reformed theologians of the possibility of natural theology has simply been a discussion among theologians as to how their discipline ought to be practiced: no natural theology, just scriptural theology. But as Alvin Plantinga observed in his “Reason and Belief in God” (Plantinga and Wolterstorff 1983), there’s something else, of great importance, going on beneath the surface of these discussions. It was characteristic of the Enlightenment to insist that no one is entitled to beliefs about God unless she holds those beliefs for reasons consisting of other, immediately formed beliefs which are *epistemically certain* for her – or at least, *more certain* than any of her beliefs about God could ever be. The position has come to be called *evidentialism* concerning theistic beliefs. The Reformed theologians who rejected natural theology were also implicitly rejecting evidentialism of this sort; in doing so, they were both forming the Reformed tradition on this matter and expressing it.

Not until this century, however, has that rejection moved significantly beyond the status of an intuitively felt conviction to become a philosophically articulate position. It was first articulated in more or less Wittgensteinian fashion in a number of essays by O. K. Bouwsma (Bouwsma 1984). More recently it has been articulated by Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and a number of others (Plantinga and Wolterstorff 1983), into an account of the epistemology of religious belief which Plantinga has dubbed “Reformed epistemology.” The theory consists of the double thesis that many people hold many of their beliefs about God basically (that is, immediately, not on the basis of other beliefs), and that often they are *entitled* thus to hold them. Such beliefs



are, in Plantinga's terminology, "properly basic." It's important to be clear that the claim is not that anybody in any circumstance who holds any belief about God is entitled to do so; the claim is rather the much more nuanced claim that a good many of the beliefs about God that people hold basically are entitled beliefs (see Chapter 79, Reformed Epistemology).

Even that cautious claim is sufficient, however, to contradict such Enlightenment figures as John Locke, who held it to be a matter of fundamental human responsibility that no normal adult ever holds any beliefs about God basically. Ever since the heyday of the Enlightenment there has been a great deal of scurrying, by Christians and other believers, both to provide the evidence called for by Locke and his cohorts, and to reduce or modify their religious convictions until the point is reached where the evidence available supposedly supports whatever belief remains. Plantinga, Wolterstorff, and their allies have called that whole endeavor into question. Rather than trying to meet the demands of evidentialism, those demands ought to be rejected. At bottom, Christian belief neither is nor ought to be an inference from more fundamental beliefs, nor an explanatory theory. What led Locke and the other Enlightenment figures to espouse evidentialism concerning theistic belief was their adherence to classically modern foundationalism; accordingly, much of the discussion surrounding Reformed epistemology has focused on the tenability of that general epistemology.

If one is fully to understand contemporary philosophy of religion in the Reformed tradition one must be aware of a second line of thought, in addition to the rejection of natural theology and evidentialism; namely, the vision of Christian learning characteristic of the neo-Calvinist movement. The movement's principal founder was Abraham Kuyper, turn of the century Dutch theologian, journalist, university-founder, and politician.

We have seen it to be characteristic of theologians in the Reformed tradition to deny the possibility of theology as a generically human enterprise. Theology is unavoidably "perspectival," shaped by the particularities of attitude and conviction that one brings to the enterprise. Kuyper argued that the same is true for learning in general. Not each and every part thereof; significant portions of natural science may well have good claim to being generically human enterprises. But the humanities and the social sciences are clearly perspectival. What Kuyper especially emphasized is that the *religious* attitudes and convictions that we as human beings bring to the humanities and social sciences unavoidably shape our positions in those disciplines (Kuyper 1980). He urged that we forthrightly acknowledge this fact, surrender the pretense that academic learning is or can be a neutral enterprise, and allow the academy as a whole to be pluralized, so that Christians can practice forthrightly Christian learning, naturalists can practice forthrightly naturalistic learning, and so forth.

Of course there was wide recognition among Christian scholars in the nineteenth century that not only in theology, but in other fields as well, a good deal of the scholarship being produced was inimical to Christianity. In the Anglo-American tradition, Hume functioned as the great *bête noire* (see Chapter 13, Early Modern Philosophical Theology in Great Britain). But such tension was explained as the result of scholars not acting with due objectivity and impartiality; competent and responsible scholarship, so it was assumed, would always be compatible with Christianity. Kuyper's



suggestion was profoundly different. By any reasonable test of academic competence and responsibility, at least some of the scholarship inimical to Christianity is competent and responsible. But scholarship yielding the opposite conclusions may also be that. The test of competence and responsibility does not weed significant diversity out of the academy. The academy is unavoidably pluralistic. Kuyper was attacking the fundamentals of the Enlightenment theory of the academy, espousing in its place what would now be called a “postmodern” theory of the academy.

Kuyper’s influence within the field of philosophy divided into three major strands. In the Netherlands itself there emerged the so-called philosophy of the Law-Idea, developed especially by Herman Dooyeweerd and his close associate, Dirk Vollenhoven. Dooyeweerd taught for many years in the law faculty of the university founded by Kuyper, the Free University of Amsterdam, and Vollenhoven for many years taught in its philosophy faculty. In South Africa, the main figure was H. G. Stoker, himself influenced by Dooyeweerd, who taught in the philosophy faculty at the University of Potchefstroom. In North America, the main figure was William Harry Jellema, who taught for many years at Calvin College. Jellema was joined in the 1940s by a former student, Henry Stob; in the early 1950s they were joined by Evan Runner, a disciple of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven. Plantinga, Wolterstorff, and a large number of other philosophers were in turn students of these three.

The philosophical differences among these three strands was and is considerable; they are united, however, in the convictions that scholarship is unavoidably perspectival with respect to humanity’s religions, and that the Christian ought to conduct his or her learning in fidelity to the Christian gospel. Wolterstorff’s booklet, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion* (Wolterstorff 1976), and Plantinga’s Notre Dame inaugural address, “Advice to Christian philosophers” (Plantinga 1984), are attempts to articulate that central conviction within the conceptuality of Anglo-American philosophy, with Wolterstorff speaking about Christian learning in general, and Plantinga, about Christian philosophy.

Though a sizable body of philosophical scholarship emerged within each of these three strands, it is only within the American strand that philosophy of religion, and more specifically philosophical theology, has flourished. Its failure to flourish in the Dutch and South African strands is probably to be attributed to the neo-Kantian cast of Dooyeweerd’s thought. Dooyeweerd held that our concepts lack applicability beyond the “temporal horizon,” as he called it. We can talk about human religion, and we can talk about revelation; but about the God revealed we can say nothing beyond how God is revealed within the temporal horizon. Philosophical theology, understood as philosophers speaking about God, was thus ruled out of court. That left room, in principle, for philosophy of religion proper; in fact, however, very little of that emerged (see Chapter 14, *The Emergence of Modern Philosophy of Religion*).

The attitude of Jellema, profoundly influenced by Kuyper but scarcely at all by Dooyeweerd, was very different. Jellema’s philosophical affinities were not at all with Kant, but with the Christian philosophers and theologians of the Middle Ages; that led him to encourage rather than proscribe philosophical theology. As with philosophy in general, he understood philosophical theology to be inevitably perspectival in character; he himself practiced and encouraged *Christian* philosophical reflections on God. But he did not doubt that we could genuinely speak of God.

Thus it is that a good deal of the philosophy of religion that has emerged in recent years from American representatives of the Reformed tradition has been philosophical theology. No consensus has yet developed: there is no such thing as a new Reformed philosophical theology. Members of the tradition have lively disagreements with each other on almost all of the important issues – with the signal exception of the fact that all of them adopt a realist interpretation of theistic language and belief (see Chapter 76, Theological Realism and Antirealism).

There is a shared ethos, however. It is typical of these philosophers both to take the whole tradition of Christian philosophy and theology with great seriousness, and to feel free to rethink elements of the tradition, sometimes coming out in defense of the tradition, sometimes in disagreement. In this rethinking, scripture is always treated as speaking with authority, and recent developments in general philosophy are used whenever appropriate. Sometimes the Reformed philosophers of religion have themselves played a prominent role in those recent developments. It is in this spirit that Plantinga has argued against the medieval doctrine of divine simplicity (Plantinga 1980) and has developed a now-classic formulation of the free will defense in which he espouses an incompatibilist account of the relation between God and human freedom which would hardly have pleased Calvin (Plantinga 1974). It is also in this spirit that Wolterstorff has argued against the traditional doctrines of the eternity and the impassibility of God (Wolterstorff 1975) and has developed a philosophical articulation and defense of the traditional claim that God speaks (Wolterstorff 1995). No doubt this freedom that contemporary philosophers of the Reformed tradition feel, to rethink elements of the classical theory of God in the light of scripture and with the aid of recent philosophy, is a manifestation of the fact, mentioned earlier, that they do not regard Christian belief itself as in any way a theory.

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## The Jewish Tradition

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### Introduction

Jewish philosophy in the twentieth century has been led by a series of thinkers who emphasize a radical ethics. As philosophers, the group has made a continuing argument that ethics is first philosophy, and that social relations are the primary concern of ethics. They have translated theological concepts into ethical responsibilities. And in translating, they follow in a long tradition of Jewish thought. This chapter will first introduce this set of philosophers, then discuss the relationship of idealism and empiricism in their work. The third section will present their best-known emphasis: the dialogic nature of experience and thought. The fourth section will examine its implications for theology, and finally the conclusion will discuss these philosophers' interests in Jewish texts.

While Jewish philosophy has a long history, the key figure for its contemporary emergence is Hermann Cohen (1842–1918). Cohen was the leader of the Marburg school, the great rediscovering of Kant in the late nineteenth century. While all of Cohen's system addressed Jewish themes directly, and indeed conformed to an idealist concept of ethical monotheism, only later in his life did Cohen devote his philosophical energies to extensive direct examination of Jewish thought. The culmination was his final posthumous work, *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism* (1919). Cohen argued that there is rational religion, religion produced by reason alone, and that Jewish sources provided key insight for constructing that religion. Particularly important were the insights into the re-creation of the individual in repentance and atonement, the messianic hope for a peaceful world, and the suffering of the Jewish people for the sins of the world. Cohen dominated the Jewish intellectual world during his life, and his account of these various themes has formed part of the agenda of Jewish philosophy throughout this century.

One of Cohen's students was Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929). Rosenzweig was raised in a largely assimilated family and eventually came to study Jewish thought philosophically. He wrote a dissertation with Meinecke on Hegel and the state, but opted not to pursue an academic career. Instead, he began an adult education school in Frankfurt (Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus), where the German-Jewish community could learn more about Jewish tradition not only from Rosenzweig, but also from Martin

Buber, Gershom Scholen, S. Y. Agnon, Nahum Glatzer, and others. Rosenzweig wrote only one other book, *The Star of Redemption*. After completing that book at the conclusion of the war, he lectured and wrote various smaller essays, and devoted his productive time to translation of, and commentary on, traditional Jewish texts. *The Star*, however is one of the grandest, most profound, and most challenging works in the whole of philosophical literature. Constructed with a rigorous and somewhat obscure architectonic, it has three tiers of eternities, each of which has its own methodology and its own social reality. In this article, it would be impossible to give a fair sense of how the book works, but it directly transforms and challenges the work of his teacher, Cohen. Moreover, within this set of thinkers, Rosenzweig emerges as the intellectual leader. He not only transformed Cohen's thought, but he also directly challenged and aided Buber, particularly throughout the 1920s. And Emmanuel Levinas frankly admits in various places his great debt to Rosenzweig, and to *The Star* in particular.

Rosenzweig cooperated with Martin Buber (1878–1965) in a translation of the Bible into German during his last years. Rosenzweig was stricken with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) and died at the age of 43. Buber, however, had a long and influential life, contributing to various intellectual movements, including the reception of Hasidic thought in the West, the emergence of Zionism, dialogical philosophy, and a humanist recovery of the Bible. The single most influential work from this group of writers, *I and You*, explored the relations between a speaker and others, displaying the key ethical responsibility in using language. The essays collected in the volume *Between Man and Man* develop this theme further, and also situate it in relation to existentialism (see Chapter 18, Phenomenology and Existentialism).

The fourth and final member of this group is Emmanuel Levinas (1906–95). Levinas was raised in Lithuania and Russia, but moved to France in 1926. He was a student of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger and the first translator of Husserl into French. He was an instructor and then principal of a Jewish school for training teachers, and only received an academic position in 1961, coinciding with the publication of his most important work, *Totality and Infinity*. This was followed in 1974 by a more dense and difficult work, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*. Levinas' work has transformed the phenomenological idiom into service for an ethics. His most famous concept is that of the face, as the address of another person to me that occurs when I am seen by another. Levinas' own writings, moreover, include a variety of essays on Jewish themes, including a set of Talmudic readings. His influence has extended throughout postmodern thought.

## Epistemology Converted to Ethics

The initial step in this Jewish ethics is a critique of epistemology, and most of all, of an idealist epistemology. This step is largely against Cohen's system, but it is also against Hegel's. Interestingly, Cohen's argument for a thoroughgoing idealism itself has a Jewish analog in creation *ex nihilo* (from nothing). Cohen argues that all knowledge and all experience must be produced through pure reasoning, admitting no contribution from passive sensation. He produces an idealist account of sensation by use of infinitesimal calculus, insisting that all knowledge about sensation must be based on

the rational generation of sensation. To admit that there is passive reception in sensation is to limit God's freedom in relation to the world and to deny God's radical transcendence. Cohen, like the transcendental school before him, argues that all experience – of objects, of people, of culture – is produced in reason, indeed in pure reason. Hence he represents one of the high points of the idealistic account of the autonomous subject, transcendentally authorizing everything which is.

For his students and followers (including Rosenzweig, Buber, and also Mikhail Bakhtin and his circle) the problem that breaks with this idealistic theory is the interruption by another person. When I hold that another person can appear to me only through my generation of the representation of that other, I compromise the other person's freedom. The discontinuity between me and an other, the imprevisibility of the other's freedom, indeed the contingency of the other's character and address to me – all break up the unifying integrity that a transcendental ego can give to experience. Cohen stretched both in his system and in his *Religion* to reach toward the particularity of the self. He discussed the creation of the I-you, focusing on sympathy for the other person, but the independence of the other person from my cognition was unassimilable in his thought. For each of the other thinkers the key moment for ethics is the inaccessibility of the other person to my thought, whatever I think, however I represent or intend others. The excess beyond my anticipation that another person bears reverses the epistemological authority of the self. Instead of acting as a clearinghouse or gatekeeper for what will be experienced, I become the object of experience, or become subjected to whatever the other chooses to do or say. Thought will have to take second place to another's address, appearing as a response to other people and not as an *a priori* construction of what is possible.

But, despite this irruption, this ethics is not itself independent of thought's earlier idealism. Instead, it operates by inverting or reversing the system that enthrones the ego. Thus in the three "dialogic" members, there is a retention of a place for knowledge, indeed, for objectifying knowledge. This is clearest in Buber, who divides the world into I-you and I-it relations. In the I-you, I am open in a reciprocal dialogue with another person. I address that person directly, saying "you" to her. In the I-it relation, I regard or represent something else as an "it," as an object. Even people can be experienced in the I-it. For Buber, the I-it is not evil, not intrinsically a bad way to deal with things, or people. Rather, the stability and consistency of the I-it facilitates the knowledge and preservation of the possibilities for I-you dialogue. The two cycle through each other, in the best situation, and in no situation can an I-you last and endure. The relationship to an other requires moments of latency, where the possibility for I-you continues, but where the I-it appears.

Rosenzweig also required a place for cognition. Indeed, his argument in *The Star* requires a relation to pure cognition in order to interpret linguistic experience. Thus his turn to language cannot afford to dismiss reason. Instead, in part 1 of *The Star*, Rosenzweig uses reason to construct three elements (God, world, and the human). These elements are rational reconstructions of irrational objects, or of the unknowable God (or world, or human nature). The turn to language, in part 2, requires an extraversion of the elements in pairwise fashion, as language is interpreted as the experience of limited two-term relations between pairs of elements. The resources for his theological interpretation of relations depend on having already secured independent terms. Only



because God can be unknowable does revelation have the freedom and import that it has. Only because a person can withdraw from the world is moral action joining and trying to fix the world. Rosenzweig allows pure reason a place in his thought – as the concepts for interpreting the experiential relations of speech.

Levinas, too, despite his emphasis on the infinite in relation to another person, and the primacy of that ethical relation, preserves a place for idealism and its knowledge, under the rubric *The Same*. The title of his major work is not “Totality or Infinity,” but *Totality and Infinity*. When the transcendental ego intends its object of representation, it assimilates what is other to its own intentionality, and totalizes over its world. Since ethics is about the breaking up of that totality, it is all too easy to say that Levinas’ egological reading of Husserl is a foil, a prime example of what is bad about the philosophical tradition. However, Levinas begins essay after essay by retelling the tale of philosophy as a totalizing idealism. The interruption by the face, the approach of the other, the wound of the naked skin – these various images of ethical assignment – are all situated after an often lengthy discussion of how consciousness works to unify and assimilate the world. For readers who want only to find out about responsibility, this detour through phenomenological idealism is often confusing and frustrating. But Levinas argues insistently that only as an extraverted idealist self can I become responsible for others, can I become ethical. The totality constructs a person who is able to not give to others, and then is commanded to give precisely what the person has hoarded. Idealism is not merely a prior historical moment, but is intrinsic in the emergence of this radical ethics. And in a similar vein, the postmodernism of this ethics is not a dismissal of the modern, but is rather a particular kind of transformation and retention of it.

## Dialogues and Others

The focus for this group is not, however, that idealism serves a key role, but rather that something happens in using language that breaks with what has been available to reason alone. The linguistic turn for Jewish thought is not so much a discovery of language as an inescapable medium for thought and for experience, but rather a discovery of a kind of pragmatics where relations between people are produced and lived in the act of speaking. The performance of speaking produces ethical relations not by subordinating desires to some general principles, but by offering signs and standing surety for the other person’s words.

If we start with Buber, we can see that to say “you” to someone is to address that person directly, expecting to be spoken to in response. A “you” has a voice. To address someone as “you” is already to be in some sort of relation with the other person. Buber emphasizes a kind of cooperation between us and demands that to say “you” is also to be addressable as a “you.” The I-you is a reciprocal relation – but not one of simple unanimity or agreement. I can argue with you vociferously, but so long as I regard you or address you as “you,” I am still in an I-you relation. From a pragmatics vocabulary, we see a variety of key concepts at play, most of all the indexicality of the terms “I” and “you”: they do not name general characters or speakers, but indicate the specificity of speaker and listener positions – specificity not reducible to a rational deduction.



The issue for Rosenzweig and Levinas is still more complex: for both emphasize the asymmetries in speaking and listening. My role as listener is not the inverse of my role as speaker. First I must listen, and then respond. The responsiveness makes my own address (from my point of view) quite different than the address to which I attend. Moreover, in the first address to me both thinkers hear a command. The indicative develops only in response. I am obliged before I know, and also before I choose. This responsibility (re-sponse-ability) rests with me, but it is not symmetrically required of the person to whom I respond. For Rosenzweig, the key to interpreting the dialogue is to note that I cannot tell what the other person will say to me, and I might not even know what I will say. The need for time, the discontinuity in the conversation, makes listening and waiting for the other to take a turn central to the experience. Reason can deduce its principles and its conclusions in a timeless present, but speaking takes time. In Rosenzweig's work, moreover, communities form by saying "we," and not only "I" and "you." But even those groups are locked in dialogue with other groups ("ye") and achieve their own cooperative discourse in relation to further asymmetrical responsibilities. Using language, both as individuals and as communities, implicates both speakers and listeners in a wide range of responsibilities, and so orients ethics toward other people prior to justifying principles with recourse to reason.

## God

There is also the possibility of a dialogue with God. One can say that prayer is a dialogue with God, an address to a "You." In Buber's work, we find this account of address to God to be the one I-you that cannot slip into an I-it, because God can be addressed only as "You." Buber also claims that God speaks to us in all I-you relations, that God is revealed in every moment when I am addressed as "you." That revelation is not revelation of God's properties, even of transcendental qualities. Rather, the revelation is instantaneous, but I do not learn anything about God. Indeed, the temporary quality of I-you relations accentuates how God is absent, or better, eclipsed, most of the time.

But when we shift to Rosenzweig, we find that room is made for transforming the instants of revelation into certain kinds of relational knowledge – knowledge garnered in linguistic relations, and knowledge that refers to those relations. For Rosenzweig, the traditional claim that God speaks in human language becomes literally true. Because revelation is a two-party relation, between God and people, God requires a medium that is accessible to the recipients of revelation. Language serves because it is the medium in which people form relations. Rosenzweig interprets the grammar of speaking as an organon for relations between God, human beings, and the world. Significantly, much of human speech about the world can be linked to a recognition that God has created the world – and in such a case God is not addressed directly, and so does not appear as "You." Human response to the irruptions of direct address serves to transform God from a "You" to a "He." (Rosenzweig does not examine the gender issues with great care.) But, in contrast to Buber, such address about God, in the context of address toward God and response to God, now appears as vital to the relation. Rosenzweig, unlike Buber, can redeem knowledge of God within the linguistic relations of human speech.

But for Levinas, the motion in traditional prayers from “You” to “Ruler of the Universe” marks not the emergence of knowledge, but the measure of excessive objectivity. Indeed, the excess, the infinity of God, passes beyond presence. For Levinas, God cannot simply appear or join in a relation with a human. Instead, what we do encounter or experience is only a trace of God who has passed by. God’s absence or presence is enigmatic: it can neither be converted into evidence, nor is it a simple absence. Rather, it is a trace that appears but cannot be resolved as a presence. The ethical import of traces is that responsibility commands but cannot compel. Moreover, God transcends the role of interlocutor. Yet the name, God, itself appears. Indeed, this austere theology appears in every good-bye (God be with you: *à-dieu*). It also appears in Jewish texts, and in the processes of reading those texts.

### Reading Jewish Texts

This set of Jewish thinkers inherits from Cohen an attention to traditional Jewish texts. They do not simply seek philosophical concepts in the Bible or the Talmud, but rather engage texts as sources for their philosophy, sources not only of concepts, but also of ways of interpreting. Most obvious is the joint translation of the Bible by Buber and Rosenzweig. Although Buber had to finish the translation alone, and although Rosenzweig was paralyzed during these years of his life, the two engaged in the most important collaboration in modern Jewish thought. The translation attempted to disrupt the target language, to make German seem strange and new by carrying over many Hebrew characteristics. The result is a deeply Jewish German Bible, in marked distinction from Luther’s Bible. The commitment to displaying the difference of the earlier text to its new context reflects the way that dialogue is not about shared experiences, but about the risky bridges that do not reduce difference. The volume of essays that address this translation project stands as one of the most challenging accounts of translation, made richer by its concrete engagement with the Bible.

But Buber, Rosenzweig, and Levinas (as well as Cohen and others) are also readers. They participate in a hermeneutic version of the linguistic turn: that is, they think by interpreting Jewish texts, as well as philosophical texts. Unlike natural theology, their thought is situated within streams of interpreters, streams which have cut strata of interpretations: Bible, Midrash, Mishnah and Talmud, Commentaries and Codes, and so on. These thinkers are not merely adding a new shelf in the library of philosophy of religion, but rather a different tradition of reading – a way of reading that offers an alternative model for philosophical thought.

Characteristic of this reading is the attempt to solicit meaning in the text. An active trust animates the readers in the tradition when reading the earlier strata. This yields what Levinas will call the inspired nature of a text: that it bears more meaning than the author intends. The attempt to identify a singular historical intended meaning of a text is replaced with an ongoing solicitation of new meanings in new contexts. Rabbinic texts make this plurality of meanings explicit, often juxtaposing contrary readings and retaining even those opinions which are deemed inadequate. For philosophy, this introduces a sense that thought is located within a field of legitimate but contrary thoughts. Such openness is in contrast to a modern effort to fix meaning univocally.

This open field is not unbounded, not open to just any reading. Instead, the texts construct webs of opinions which are bounded by actions of the community. The social construction of rabbinic texts (Midrash and Talmud), for example, honors the memory of various sages, but obscures the identity of the editor, leaving the authority for the text in the community. Moreover, in Levinas' reading of Talmudic texts, he emphasizes that rabbinic reading emerges out of a concern for ethics and for others' suffering. While Rosenzweig interprets the Midrash as helping to form the Jewish community, Levinas interrogates Talmudic discourse to see the conflicts of responsibilities in play in making the weave of relations that is a community. These thinkers find the texts addressing contemporary communities and make the practices of reading accessible as a way of opening to the ethics that transpires between people engaged in conversation. The recourse to these reading and writing practices is the privileged way to discover the ethical address that forms the religious community. Jewish philosophy occurs at an intersection of reading Jewish texts and dialogic thought.

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## The Christian East

PAUL VALLIERE

Philosophical and theological reflection in the modern Eastern Christian tradition has been both closely linked with Western thought and sharply divided from it. Most of the divisions can be traced to the separate historical evolution of the peoples and cultures of the Christian East.

Most Eastern Christian nations are heirs to the intellectual and spiritual patrimony of Byzantine civilization. Loyalty to this heritage steered the East clear of the most distinctive developments shaping philosophy and theology in the West, namely, scholasticism, the Renaissance, and the Reformation. The decisive differentiator was probably scholasticism; at least this is how most Eastern Christian thinkers have tended to see it. According to this view the schoolmen developed a methodology for abstract rational analysis which, while originally intended as a means of justifying faith claims, led to the cultivation of autonomous reason, i.e., reason as methodologically independent of the dogmatic tradition and the lived (ethical, liturgical, mystical) experience of faith. This worldly sensibility of the Renaissance was one outcome of the exercise of autonomous reason; Protestantism, which employed scholastic methods to justify non-traditional interpretations of faith, was another. In Eastern Christian tradition, by contrast, "theology" was not regarded as an autonomous, rationally constructed academic discipline but as a mystical-ascetical discipline bound up "with the immediate vision of the personal God, with the personal experience of the transfiguration of creation by uncreated grace" (Yannaras 1972, p. 195).

To be sure, the Christian East did not "miss" the Renaissance and the Reformation from purely theoretical considerations. The forcible incorporation of most of the Eastern Christian peoples into the Islamic Ottoman Empire in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries put a cruel end to intellectual pursuits and led to a steep decline in teaching and learning throughout the Christian East. The cultivation of secular erudition in particular was affected. Byzantium had known several periods of "humanism" in its long history, i.e., moments when the Greek literary, philosophical, and scientific tradition, which had never been lost, was renewed for a variety of purposes in church and state. But humanism was limited to the governing elite, and with the destruction of the Byzantine state in 1453 it lost its *raison d'être*. The oppressed Christians of the East did not preserve their identity during centuries of Islamic hegemony by studying Plato, but by clinging to their church.

The only sizable Eastern Christian country to escape the imposition of heterodox rule in early modern times was Russia. There, with its capital at Moscow, a mighty state arose to revitalize the Byzantine tradition. But this renewal did not extend to Byzantine humanism and could not have done so because of the nature of the cultural product exported to Russia by Byzantium. Unlike the Latins, the Byzantine missionaries carried the gospel to the pagans of northern Europe in the vernacular; the Greek language and the learning connected with it were not exported. While this approach to enculturating the gospel has been much admired in modern times by missionary theorists and Slav philologists, it probably retarded the development of learning in the Christian East. The culture of Muscovy shone with uncommon brightness in iconography, church architecture, asceticism, mysticism, and other pursuits closely connected with the practice of Orthodox Christianity, but one looks in vain for glimmers of the humane learning that was part of Byzantine civilization. There were no schools or colleges, not even for training clergy. Theology as a formal discipline did not exist any more than philosophy did.

The academic study of theology and philosophy began to be cultivated in the Russian lands in the seventeenth century. Kiev Academy, which for nearly 200 years would rank as the premier theological institution in the Christian East, was founded in 1632 by Metropolitan Petro Mohyla. From the start the school was committed to apologetics. Ukraine had long been under Polish rule, and the Roman Catholic Church was making considerable progress in promoting a form of church union whereby Orthodox Christian communities accepted papal authority while preserving their own liturgical and canonical traditions. The defense of Orthodox Christian independence in the face of this threat was the chief vocation of Kiev Academy. As so often happens, however, apologetics prompted the adoption of the opponent's methods, which in Ukraine meant the scholasticism of the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation. The curriculum of Kiev Academy was patterned on that of a Jesuit college, most textbooks were of Western provenance, and Latin was the language of instruction.

In a famous study Georges Florovsky (1937) presented the history of modern Russian theology as the story of its alienation from authentic Eastern Christian tradition. Naturally he saw Kiev Academy as one of the culprits. In its time, however, the Academy and other schools founded on its example fostered a significant religious and cultural revival, a Ukrainian Enlightenment which extended beyond the ecclesiastical sphere to include arts, letters, statecraft, and, finally, religious philosophy. The first original religious philosopher in the modern Eastern Christian tradition, Hryhory Savych Skovoroda (1722–94), was a product of this milieu.

Peter the Great relied heavily on the expertise of Ukrainian scholars and churchmen when he launched the titanic project of modernizing the Russian Empire in the eighteenth century. The methods of theological and philosophical study practiced at Kiev were adopted by the schools and seminaries set up by the Russian Orthodox Church as part of Peter's modernization program. Protestant and Enlightenment influences also began to be felt in Russia at this time, adding to the complexity of the theological scene.

Despite powerful Western models, theological studies in Russia did not follow the European pattern in all respects. When the first Russian university was founded at Moscow in 1755, a theological faculty was not created in it, nor did theology figure in subsequent university foundations. Early in the nineteenth century the Russian

Orthodox Church established three graduate schools of theology, called academies, in association with the seminaries at St. Petersburg, Sergiev Posad, and Kiev. A fourth academy was created at Kazan in 1842. The four theological academies, while administered exclusively by the Orthodox Church, played an important role in the development of philosophy as well as theology in Russia.

The theological academies promoted the indigenization of theology in Russia. Russian was the language of instruction. Historical theologians – then as now more influential than biblical or philosophical theologians in shaping Eastern Christian thought – began to direct attention to the patristic sources of Orthodox Christian tradition. The academies also played a role in mediating the revival of contemplative monasticism to the Orthodox public.

The revival began in the eighteenth century in Greek and Romanian monasteries. Its vehicle was the *Philokalia*, a collection of patristic ascetical and mystical writings compiled by Nikodemus of the Holy Mountain (Mt. Athos in Greece) and translated into Slavonic and Russian by the monk Paisy Velichkovsky and his disciples. Because the monastic revivalists propagated not just a spiritual discipline but a body of texts, the way was open for lay scholars and other non-monastic consumers of theological literature to appropriate the material for their own purposes.

The spirituality associated with the *Philokalia* is usually called hesychasm, from Greek *hesychia* “quietude.” At its core is the “prayer of the mind,” a meditative discipline aimed at purifying the mind to such a degree that it can see the uncreated divine *energeiai*, “energies,” that pervade creation, though not the divine *ousia*, “essence,” which is regarded as unknowable. Meditative practice was given Christological content by mantra-like repetition of what came to be called the “prayer of the heart” or Jesus-Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Two ideas connected with hesychasm play a central role in modern Eastern Christian thought. One is the essence/energies distinction, systematized (though not invented) by the Byzantine theologian Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) in polemics with Thomism. The concept of the uncreated energies of God enjoys virtually canonical status in modern Orthodox Christian thought, although at least one Orthodox theologian would cast it in “a more humble role” (Papanikolaou 2006, p. 6). The second idea is *theosis*, or “deification,” which expresses Eastern Christians’ metaphysical optimism about the degree to which the image and likeness of God can be activated in human beings, both now and in the age to come. Western Christian theologians, at least since Augustine, have tended to emphasize the impairment of humankind’s original God-like nature in consequence of the Fall, a view which the Reformation carried to an extreme in the theory of the radical depravity of human nature (see Chapter 72, Sin and Original Sin). Eastern Christian thinkers, by contrast, insist that the divine image has been obscured but not destroyed by sin. The dignity and beauty of human beings can be perceived (by those with eyes to see) in the most depraved of human beings. As for the saintliest, the divine image shines in them so brightly as to provide a glimpse of the divine glory. The saints lead the way to *theosis*, validating the words of the psalmist: “You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you” (Psalm 82:6; cf. John 10:34).

The theology of *theosis* was further elaborated by expositors of the twentieth-century “neopatristic synthesis,” as Florovsky called it. John Meyendorff’s pivotal study (1959) of Gregory Palamas opened up the world of Byzantine theology to a wide theological



public, East and West. Other medieval theologians prized by the hesychasts, such as Pseudo-Dionysius (Dionysius the Areopagite), Maximus the Confessor, and Symeon the New Theologian, have also received fresh attention. In a stunning essay Vladimir Lossky (1944) developed the systematic aspects of the subject. Mystical theology, Lossky argued, is not kataphatic (positive) but apophatic (negative); it proceeds by saying what God is not as opposed to what God is. While this might sound like a recipe for skepticism, it in fact a dimension of the ascetical project of purifying the mind in preparation for transfiguration by the uncreated energies. Apophasis is intellectual hesychia.

Dominant since the mid-twentieth century, the neopatristic or (more narrowly) neo-Palamite synthesis is not the only force at work in modern Eastern Christian thought. Equally important, but quite different in its concerns and methods, is the tradition of religious philosophy which originated in Russia in the nineteenth century. The Russian school arose in the generation following the Napoleonic Wars when Russian noblemen who had studied in European universities sought to interpret Russian reality, including Eastern Christianity, using concepts drawn from Western thought, not just Greek patristic sources. They believed such a move was necessary if Orthodoxy was “to respond to a new situation created by centuries of philosophical development” from which the Christian East had been cut off (Schmemmann 1972, p. 178). The most notable thinkers of the first generation of Russian religious philosophers were Aleksei Stepanovich Khomiakov (1804–60), whose work focused on church and society, and Ivan Vasilievich Kireevsky (1806–56), who had a gift for speculative philosophy. Both were Russian Orthodox renewalists dedicated to reinvigorating the sense of personal and communal responsibility in their church. The values promoted by Khomiakov and Kireevsky were crystallized in the neologism *sobornost'*, “togetherness,” which became a staple of modern Eastern Christian ethics and ecclesiology. *Sobornost'* stands for the reconciliation of freedom with fellowship in the dynamic interpersonal communion of the Church.

Nineteenth-century literary artists contributed to the rise of Russian religious philosophy, especially Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol, the metaphysical poet Fyodor Ivanovich Tiuchev, and the novelists Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky and Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy. Of these only Tolstoy elaborated a religious philosophy in discursive terms. His theological views, which owed much to nineteenth-century liberal interpretations of Christianity, proved sufficiently heterodox to earn him excommunication from the Orthodox Church. The other writers, all deeply loyal to Orthodoxy, spoke chiefly through their art. Dostoevsky's works were especially prized by later Eastern Christian thinkers.

From a systematic point of view Dostoevsky's greatest achievement was his theological anthropology. By Dostoevsky's time the doctrines of Ludwig Feuerbach and other anti-idealist thinkers had reached Russia. Russian radicals enthusiastically embraced the thesis that theology was misplaced anthropology. Dostoevsky, by contrast, took anthropology as the starting point for theology. To his mind the radicals erred theologically because they had already erred anthropologically. Their “species being,” while it masqueraded as an empirical datum, was in fact a sheer abstraction refuted daily by the way human beings actually behave. Every living human being is a numinous abyss, a pulsating matrix of motives from which transcendental ideals and



religious promptings cannot be expelled. "Broad, yes too broad, is man, I would narrow him!" Dmitry piteously exclaims to Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov* (pt. 1, bk. 3, ch. 3). Dostoevsky's case rested on the metaphysical optimism of Eastern Christianity: anthropology can be the starting point for theology because every human being bears the actual, and actualizable, image of God in his or her personal being. Nikolai Berdyaev (1931), inspired by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as well as by Dostoevsky, elaborated a system of theological ethics on this basis.

The pivotal figure in the history of Russian religious philosophy was a young friend of Dostoevsky's, Vladimir Sergeevich Solovyov (1853–1900). Solovyov owed his influence not just to his intellectual brilliance but to his genius for linking conventionally separated worlds: amateur wisdom-seeking with professional philosophy, secular thought with Orthodox dogmatics, rational discourse with mystical contemplation. Methodologically Solovyov's philosophy was a form of idealism in the tradition of Schelling, especially the Schelling of the 1841 Berlin lectures and "positive philosophy" (concrete idealism).

The substantive ideal of Solovyov's thought was the grand union of opposites which he called *bogochelovechestvo*, "Godmanhood" (or "divine humanity," "humanity of God"), the divine-human communion toward which he saw the entire world-process moving. Solovyov believed that Eastern Christianity had an indispensable role to play in the actualization of divine humanity. He made a place for other religious traditions, too, particularly Roman Catholicism and Judaism. Solovyov was a tireless prophet of Christian ecumenism and a trenchant critic of anti-Semitism.

Like the German idealists, Solovyov cast his philosophical net widely, setting the agenda for Russian Orthodox thought for years to come in several fields. His concept of *vseedinstvo*, "all-unity," "the unity of all things" – which despite its name is not a formula for monism but for a metaphysics of relatedness that invites analogy with Anglo-American process philosophy (see Chapter 17, Process Theology) – became the leitmotif of the twentieth-century Russian school of metaphysics elaborated by Pavel Aleksandrovich Florensky, Lev Platonovich Karsavin, and Semyon Liudvigovich Frank. Solovyov's writings on ethics and law, notably *The Justification of the Good* (1897), contributed to the formation of an indigenous brand of socio-political liberalism in early twentieth-century Russia. His aesthetics influenced the rise of the Symbolist movement in Russian literature and oriented the work of the leading Russian aesthetician of the twentieth century, Aleksei Fyodorovich Losev. Solovyov also bequeathed the concept of Sophia to Russian religious philosophy. While the term "Sophia" comes from the theosophic and kabbalistic underworld of speculative philosophy, Russian "sophiology" had little in common with esoteric speculation. Embraced by Florensky and Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov a generation after Solovyov, sophiology was an attempt to link concrete social, cultural, and economic activities to the divine beauty manifested in the cosmos.

The Solovyovian stream dominated Eastern Christian religious philosophy on the eve of the Russian Revolution and in the early years of the Russian emigration. The commanding figures were Pavel Florensky and Sergei Bulgakov, both of whom aimed at a symphonic integration of Solovyovian idealism with the dogmatic, spiritual, and liturgical traditions of the Orthodox Church. In the same generation Nikolai Lossky (father of Vladimir) elaborated a more abstract, "neo-Leibnizian" (Zenkovsky) form of

religious idealism based on an intuitivist epistemology. However, with the collapse of philosophical idealism throughout Europe in the twentieth century and the rise of the neopatristic school in Orthodox theology, the Solovyovian tradition for all practical purposes came to an end outside the USSR by the 1940s. In the USSR it continued to be cultivated by small groups of Christian intellectuals, especially during the 1960s and 1970s. But since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Orthodox Christian thinkers in Russia, too, have for the most part embraced the values and methods of neopatristic thought.

The leading scholar of Russian religious philosophy at the end of the twentieth century, S. S. Khoruzhii (Horuzhy), has typecast the entire Solovyovian tradition as “the Moscow school of Christian neoplatonism” (2005, p. 288), which he views as irreconcilable with Eastern Christian apophaticism. Drawing on neopatristic studies, Heidegger, and an encyclopedic knowledge of hesychasm, Khoruzhii has constructed his own highly original “phenomenology of ascesis” featuring a “synergistic paradigm” in which ontology and anthropology are fused via the concept of “energy.” Other apologists for apophaticism have found a powerful ally in postmodernism with its insistence on the elusiveness of meaning. The dialogue of the Eastern Christian spiritual tradition with existentialism and postmodernism is the matrix for the work of the leading contemporary Greek Orthodox religious philosopher, Christos Yannaras (Giannaras).

John Zizioulas, a Greek Orthodox bishop, has drawn on other streams of Eastern Christian tradition, namely trinitarianism and eucharistic practice, to restate the communal values of Eastern Christianity in dialogue with secularism and Western Christianity. Zizioulas sees Greek patristic trinitarianism, perfected by the Cappadocian Fathers of the fourth century (Basil the Great, Gregory Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa), as offering the most adequate ontological grounding of personhood and the best paradigm for integrating personhood with community. His development of these themes in *Being as Communion* (1985) had an impact extending far beyond Orthodoxy, especially in the fields of ecclesiology and ecumenism. More recently Zizioulas has expanded his concept of *koinonia*, “communion,” to accommodate the postmodern concern with “otherness,” a move which seems likely to further extend his influence.

Whether the Russian school of Orthodox Christian religious philosophy will be renewed and updated in the twenty-first century is an open question. A significant revival of interest in it, focused especially on Sergei Bulgakov, has been evident in the West since the 1990s, and a scholarly literature on the subject is burgeoning in Russia as well. Normative Orthodox Christian theology seems unaffected by these developments for the time being. But as the Eastern Christian churches expand their effort to minister to society in the free civil order in which they now find themselves, the relevance of Russian-school theology, or something similar to it, is likely to grow. If neopatristic theology was concerned above all with *theosis*, with finding a path from the world to the church and from the church to glory, the Russian school was concerned above all with *kenosis*, “[self]-emptying,” that is, with finding a path from the church into the world for the sake of ministry, mission, and service. The concept of *kenosis*, a hallmark of modern theology which has found applications in fields as disparate as trinitarianism and theology of nature, pervades Bulgakov’s thought in particular and may explain the degree of interest which the latter has attracted in recent years. In any case, Eastern Christian thought cannot remain unaffected by the practical demands

facing the Eastern Christian nations in the twenty-first century: rebuilding church and society after decades of Communism, and finding an authentic path in a world being reshaped by the processes of globalization. The challenges are daunting, but the conditions for addressing them are favorable. For the first time since the fall of Byzantium more than half a millennium ago, Eastern Christian thinkers sit at the same table and enjoy the same liberties as their Western counterparts. The time is ripe for a fresh burst of philosophical and theological creativity in the Christian East.

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## Part IV

# The Concept of God

## Perfect Being Theology

MARK OWEN WEBB

One doctrine that is agreed on by most Jews, Christians, and Muslims is that God is, in some sense, absolutely perfect. The same idea occurs in other traditions as well – some strains of Advaita Vedanta, and in the Mahāyāna doctrine of the Buddha-nature, for example (see, e.g., Griffiths 1994) – but it is in the theology of the three Abrahamic religions that the concept of an absolutely perfect being is explored in the greatest depth. The concept of a perfect being allows a broad scope for *a priori* theological inference, which has led in all three traditions to a rich theological project called “perfect being theology.” A different strain of theology, one that more naturally proceeds in an *a posteriori* way, starts from the concept of God as the designer or creator of the world. For example, Aquinas thought that substantive theological claims could be deduced from the concept of God as *that which exercises providence over everything* (see Chapter 39, Providence).

The conception of God from which perfect being theology begins can vary considerably. Anselm started from the idea of *that being none greater than which can be thought*, while Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz started from the idea of *a being that possesses all perfections*. More recently, Alvin Plantinga made use of the idea of maximal greatness, understood as maximal excellence in every possible world, where maximal excellence implies at least omnipotence, omniscience, and moral perfection.

Starting from concepts like these, thinkers have tried to deduce God’s existence, uniqueness, omniscience, omnipotence, moral perfection, omnipresence, eternality, impassibility, and simplicity, among other properties. (See other entries in part 4 for detailed discussions of each of these attributes.) Not all philosophers and theologians have agreed that all (or any of) these properties can be deduced from perfection. For one thing, there has been substantial disagreement as to whether these properties are compossible. There are also difficulties to be found in the coherence of some of the individual “perfections” themselves (see Chapter 55, Theism and Incoherence). A more fundamental problem is that, if the notion of a perfect being is coherent, then no doubt some perfections are unknown to human beings, and for all we know these unknown perfections are incompatible with (and more valuable than) perfections like omnipotence, omniscience, and moral perfection. This threatens to undermine all of the perfect being theologian’s *a priori* inferences about the nature of God. Finally, *a posteriori* arguments for the existence of, for example, a first cause or a benevolent creator, even if

sound, fall far short of establishing the existence of a perfect being. Thus, perfect being theology must depend on the ontological argument (see Chapter 42, Ontological Arguments) to establish the existence of a perfect being, which raises further serious doubts about its viability (Webb 1988).

## History

Although perfect being theology developed most fully in the context of the Abrahamic religions, some precursors can be found in ancient Greek and Hellenistic philosophy (see Chapter 8, Ancient Philosophical Theology). Xenophanes rejects popular pictures of the gods because God must be all-powerful, all-knowing, and omnipresent (see von Fritz 1974, pp. 30–5). Aristotle (1968, bk. lambda, sect. 7), though he starts from a cosmological argument for the existence of God, infers his perfection from his being pure act, and then infers other facts about his nature and activity from his perfection. Cicero (1997, bk. 2, sect. 8) attributes to Zeno of Citium an argument to the effect that the earth must be a deity because nothing is superior to the world, so it must have all the attributes of divinity. Plotinus (1956, *passim*) starts from the idea of God as the One, perfectly unified and without parts, and builds his theology from there.

It is in the Christian Middle Ages (see Chapter 9, The Christian Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology) that perfect being theology comes into its own. In the early Middle Ages, there are hints of perfect being theology. Augustine, for example, argues for the existence of God by arguing for the existence of Truth, which he then argues must be perfect in every way. But here the idea is to argue primarily to the perfection of God – mainly on the Platonic ground that the imperfect things in creation demand a perfect exemplar – and only secondarily from the perfection of God to his attributes. In Anselm we see the most famous and clearest example: the ontological argument. The argument starts from a very specifically defined idea of God, as *that being none greater than which can be conceived*, which, it is argued, must be a being that actually exists, else it would not be that than which nothing greater can be conceived. The argument has both defenders and detractors up to this day (though the detractors vastly outnumber the defenders). Bonaventure, Scotus, and Suarez take up some of these themes.

Islamic theology (see Chapter 10, The Islamic Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology) is more concerned with drawing conclusions from God's absolute unity (*tawhid*) than with exploring the consequences of his perfection, but there is substantial overlap between the two projects. Al-Farabi (1963), for example, in his "The Political Regime," starts with the idea that God, as the first agent, and so ultimately the cause of all other things, can have no deficiencies. The Mutazili school thought that assigning any attributes to God threatens his unity, and so concluded that God must be pure Essence. This line of thought parallels the reasoning that led Christian theologians to posit God's absolute simplicity (see Chapter 31, Simplicity). Another school, the Ash'ari, famously concluded that only God could be the originator of any causal chain, so God must be the cause of all that happens in the world. The result was a kind of occasionalism; even human actions must be caused by God, though they may be occasioned by the formation of volitions (see Saeed 2006, ch. 5).



This strain of theology is also present in Jewish thought (see Chapter 11, *The Jewish Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology*). Maimonides, for example, argues that “all perfections must really exist in God, and none of them must in any way be a mere potentiality” (1956, p. 78). He does not go on from there to develop a systematic perfect being theology, but he does draw some conclusions, including that God must be incorporeal and impassible (starting at section 55).

Anselm stands virtually alone in the medieval period as an exemplar of perfect being theology. The early modern period of European philosophy was to see Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz explore the project of perfect being theology in great depth. (See Chapter 12, *Early Modern Philosophical Theology on the Continent*; and Chapter 13, *Early Modern Philosophical Theology in Great Britain*.)

The epistemological project of Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1984, pp. 1–62) famously required some kind of proof for the existence of God, in order to provide grounding for trusting our clear and distinct perceptions. In the Third Meditation, Descartes resorts to a kind of cosmological argument (see Chapter 43, *Cosmological Arguments*), arguing from the existence of the idea of God rather than from any facts about the external world. That argument invokes the content of the idea of God as infinite, but doesn’t make use of the content in the same way as ontological arguments do. Where ontological arguments argue from the content of the idea of God alone, Descartes’ Third Meditation argument crucially depends on the existence of that idea in someone’s mind. In the Fifth Meditation, however, Descartes makes explicit use of an ontological argument that turns on the concept of God as possessing all perfections (*habere omnes perfectiones*) or as the most perfect being (*ens summe perfectus*). Once the existence of God is established, it is possible to deduce in a purely *a priori* way, simply by considering which attributes are perfections and which are not, what he must be like. In particular, it is possible to show that he is not a deceiver, since all deception depends on some defect (*omnem enim fraudem & deceptionem a defectu aliquo pendere*). This is why whatever we clearly and distinctly perceive to be true is true. Having deduced that God must be omnipotent and free, he concludes that whatever metaphysical and moral laws there are must be the product of God’s free choice (1970, letter to Mersenne, May 6, 1630). This gives God’s moral perfection a kind of arbitrary and derivative status.

Anselm and Descartes agree that a perfect being must be omnipotent and omniscient. Surprisingly, Spinoza denies God’s omniscience, based on the same idea of God that Anselm and Descartes used to affirm it. Having derived the existence of God by virtue of his being a substance (his form of the ontological argument turns on the notion of substance, rather than perfect being, although he also argues that there can be only one substance, and it in fact must be perfect), he argues that intellect and will are incompatible with omnipotence. Since omnipotence follows from the idea of a substance, God must have neither intellect nor will (1982, appendix to part 1). Admittedly, the idea of God that Spinoza ends up with is not the orthodox Judeo-Christian-Islamic conception, and most of the arguments in the *Ethics* are generally regarded as woefully inadequate. Nevertheless, he takes himself to be engaged in the same project as Descartes, i.e., deriving logical consequences from the concept of God.

Leibniz also starts from an ontological argument, one much like Descartes’. However, unlike Descartes, Leibniz thinks that it should not be taken for granted that

all perfections are compossible. Descartes defines perfections as attributes that are, among other things, unlimited by any imperfection, and so thinks it obvious that all the perfections could be instantiated in the same substance. If two apparent perfections seem to be impossible, then one of them is not really a perfection, since it is limited by an imperfection, namely, lack of the other one. Leibniz understands perfections to be attributes that are, among other things, capable of a highest degree, and thinks it is necessary to prove that they are compossible in order to go on to argue that there exists a being that instantiates them all. In "Two Notations for Discussion with Spinoza" (1989) he offers a proof for the compossibility of all perfections, starting with the definition of a perfection as a simple, positive quality, to an unlimited degree. Later, in the *New Essays concerning Human Understanding* (1981, pp. 437–8), he seems to abandon that approach, instead claiming a burden-of-proof right to assume that a supremely perfect being is possible – that is, that all perfections are compossible – unless someone proves the contrary. Once we are entitled to the premise that God is a possible being, we can proceed to show that he exists by an ontological argument, and then derive truths about what he is like. Unsurprisingly, the attributes Leibniz ascribes to God are very like those ascribed to him by Anselm and Descartes. Leibniz disagrees with Descartes, however, on one important point. Instead of concluding that God's omnipotence requires that he exercise completely indifferent free will in deciding what is true and good, he concludes that God's goodness and wisdom require that what is necessarily true and good be independent of even divine control. That there is a point like this on which Descartes could go one way and Leibniz another shows that the project of perfect being theology is not as straightforward and obvious as it might appear.

## Contemporary Problems

Contemporary perfect being theology has tended to concentrate primarily on discussion of individual alleged perfections, especially to inquire as to whether the perfection in question is internally coherent, and secondarily on the question of the compossibility of various perfections. What follows is a discussion of a few of the problems raised in recent times.

Omnipotence is usually understood as the power to do anything that is logically possible (or, perhaps, broadly logically possible). It is sometimes analyzed in terms of the making-true of propositions, sometimes in terms of the performance of tasks. The problems that can be raised vary depending on the particulars of the formulation. Some, including Descartes, think that it is inconsistent with God's power and sovereignty to be limited even by logic, but this is a minority opinion.

Perhaps the most famous challenge to the coherence of a purported divine perfection is the "stone" challenge to omnipotence: if God is omnipotent, can he make a stone so big he can't lift it? Either way one answers admits that there is something God cannot do, and so he cannot be omnipotent. The challenge cannot be dismissed as a mere verbal trick, as long as omnipotence implies at least the ability to do all logically possible tasks, and the task of making something so big that the maker can't lift it is clearly possible (piano makers do it all the time). A different challenge rests on the fact that

many things are conceptually linked to their origins. Since a genuine dime is one made by the US mint, God cannot make a genuine US dime *ex nihilo*. These types of consideration lead some to conclude that the analysis of omnipotence is at fault; the correct analysis of *God's* omnipotence is that God is able to do anything possible *for God* to do. Since the substitution of "God" in "x can make a genuine dime" and "x can make a stone so big he can't lift it" results in an incoherence, those are not tasks it is possible for God to do, so it attributes no disability to say he can't do it. This analysis of omnipotence threatens to make it so weak that many beings besides God have it. Peter Geach (1973 and 1977) follows a similar line of argument, and so dismisses several candidates for an analysis of omnipotence, finally concluding that the concept is hopelessly incoherent. He denies that this is a problem for Christians, though, since they are compelled to believe God is *almighty*, not omnipotent. (For a more detailed discussion of this problem, see Chapter 27, Omnipotence.)

Omniscience seems to present fewer problems. To be omniscient is to know all there is to know. That is, for any true proposition *p*, an omniscient being knows that *p*. There are certainly problems about what constitutes knowledge – e.g., whether belief is a necessary constituent of knowledge (see, for example, Alston 1989), as well as whether it is propositions or some other thing that is known. Those are general problems in epistemology, however, not special problems with the concept of omniscience. Whatever the solution turns out to be, it seems that omniscience can be understood accordingly. That attitude turns out to be too optimistic. For example, Patrick Grim (1991) raises a special problem for omniscience on the grounds that there is no appropriate "everything" to be the object of God's knowledge, so it makes no sense to say of God that he "knows everything." If there is no such thing as the set of all propositions, or the set of all truths, or the totality of truths, then it is impossible to give a coherent analysis of omniscience. Some have also raised problems for omniscience from knowledge *de se*. For example, I know that it is early summer now, so it is true that it is early summer now, but an eternal God can't know that (see, for example, Kretzmann 1966; for discussion of the problem that "indexical knowledge" presents for the concept of omniscience, see Chapter 55, Theism and Incoherence). This is parallel to the objection to omnipotence from actions that have a particular history essentially. This problem can be avoided if the objects of God's knowledge are tenseless propositions, or if God's knowledge is direct awareness of the universe rather than propositions.

A further problem arising from omniscience is whether it is compatible with human free will (see Chapter 56, Foreknowledge and Human Freedom). If God knows all truths, and there are truths about what I will freely do, then God now knows what I will freely do tomorrow. If God's attributes, including his knowledge, are necessary, then it seems to follow that whatever is true of my free actions in the future is now necessarily true. So it follows that it is not possible for me to act otherwise than I in fact will act. This seems to be incompatible with my acting freely. This problem has a venerable history, beginning in the medieval period, but continues to exercise contemporary philosophers. (For a thorough discussion of the problem, see Zagzebski 1991.)

Leibniz raised the question as to whether the several perfections God is supposed to have are compossible (see above). Many of the perfections attributed to God, even when they seem to be internally coherent taken one at a time, are problematic taken together. It is certainly possible to define perfection in such a way as to make it analytically true

that all perfections are compossible; on one reading, Descartes did this. It seems reasonable, especially if one is pursuing the maximal-greatness line rather than the absolute-perfection line, to say that the greatest possible being must, by definition, be possible. Ergo, any greatest possible being's attributes must be compossible. While this is certainly true, it leaves open the question whether those attributes include any of the traditional attributes of God, like omnipotence or omniscience. If a being that has all of those attributes is indeed possible, that it is possible will not be true by definition.

Here is one example of the kind of compossibility worry contemporary philosophers have discussed. Obviously, a morally perfect being is restricted as to what actions it will perform. Suppose, for the sake of simplicity, that one being is morally better than another if the first performs fewer bad actions than the second. A necessary condition for moral perfection then is to perform no bad actions. If God is necessarily morally perfect, then it follows that necessarily God cannot perform those actions. This fact seems to present a problem for the compossibility of moral perfection and omnipotence. Nelson Pike (1969) raises this problem in a stark form: If God is omnipotent, he can sin; if he is morally perfect, he can't sin. One possible response is to say that God cannot sin in the sense that he cannot bring himself to sin even though he can sin in the sense that he has the productive power required to sin. That is to say, he has the power to perform actions that would be bad if he did them, but his character is such that he will not or cannot bring himself to do them. It's not clear that this solution will work, though, if God is essentially good and so has that character at all possible worlds in which he exists. For then it follows that it is not possible for him to perform bad actions, since he doesn't perform them at any possible world. Therefore, this solution amounts either to claiming that a being can have the power to perform actions that are impossible for it to perform, or to denying that God is essentially good and so undermining religious confidence that God will always refrain from evil at the actual world. Whether it can be made to work may depend on what it means to say that God is free. If God's freedom is compatible with his actions' being determined by his reasons, then he might well have the power to perform actions it is impossible for him to perform. Another possible solution is to deny that omnipotence entails the ability to sin. Whether this solution can be made to work depends on what it means for God to be omnipotent (see above).

William Rowe (2004) raises a variant of this problem, according to which God's goodness is inconsistent with God's power to do otherwise than the best, so that God is not a significantly free being. As Rowe himself notes, there is still scope for freedom when there is more than one best action, or when there is an infinite hierarchy of good actions with no best, but it does seem to imply that God cannot be free in many important cases (see Chapter 57, *The Problem of No Best World*). Again, as with the previous problem, a lot depends on the correct analysis of freedom.

## Conclusion

Saint Anselm was confident that theology could obtain important results starting from the concept of a perfect being, and the early modern rationalists shared that confidence.

The various ways in which the project of perfect being theology has played out show that their confidence was unwarranted. The plethora of different ways perfection can be understood, as well as the different analyses for the individual perfections, show that there is no one clear way for perfect being theology to develop. The good news is that in exchange for a linearly developed deductive project, we get a rich variety of different projects, each illuminating different sides of metaphysics.

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## Holiness

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The category of “holiness” or “the holy” lies at the very ground of all genuine religion. In its most general significance, it means that which is set apart from the everyday or profane. This, however, does not get us to its root meaning; it merely informs us of its sociological function. In his seminal book *The Idea of the Holy*, Rudolf Otto decisively argues that its fundamental significance is quite complex, containing both rational and non-rational elements. Contrary to Kant and those who followed him in simply identifying the holy with the morally good (see Chapter 30, Goodness), Otto points out that in addition to its rational elements, the concept of the holy contains important non-rational elements that can only be apprehended through feeling. These feeling elements are, as he notes, “*sui generis* and irreducible” to any other mental states (Otto 1923, p. 7). Considered from the point of view of the history of the phenomenology of religions, they are what first appear in religious life, and they do so devoid of any properly ethical content. Only later are they gradually filled in with the ethical, what Otto calls the “schematization” of this primary datum.

One of the main issues arising from Otto’s analysis is the relation of the rational to the non-rational elements in the idea of the holy. How can what is felt as the awesome power and complete “otherness” of the divine, evoking feelings of terror and dread, be shown to be inherently linked to ethical categories? Without understanding how the two elements of the holy are linked, emphasis on the otherness of the divine can too easily lead to a radical voluntarism wherein God is *extra lege*, outside the law, or where the good is thought to be good only because God wills it (1923, p. 101; see Chapter 68, Divine Command Ethics). Commentators on Otto’s analysis have complained that his own solution to the problem is quite unsatisfactory, since it simply invokes one of the most obscure categories in Kant’s philosophy, that of the schema, in order to relate the rational to the non-rational aspects of the holy: for Otto, the irrational element of the holy, the numinous, eventually becomes schematized through the idea of the morally good. But what exactly he understands by the schema, or why such a schematization is necessary, remains completely undeveloped at the theoretical level.

This entry is divided into three parts. In the first, longer section I unpack Otto’s phenomenological analysis of the idea of the holy, especially its non-rational aspect. In doing so I provide examples from the history of religion that demonstrate the compelling character of Otto’s analysis. In the second I examine historical influences on Otto’s



thought, especially those of Kant and Schleiermacher. Making use of the insights gleaned from the second section, the last part of the entry will suggest a way to resolve some of the difficulties arising from Otto's analysis, especially regarding how the moral and rational aspect of the holy relates to its non-rational aspect.

### Analysis of the Holy

According to Otto, what we understand as the holy contains two elements. The first is the rational element. It is amenable to human understanding, can be apprehended through concepts, and is especially associated with the ethical sphere. This note is especially sounded in the prophets of the Hebrew Bible. Amos, for instance, preaches, "Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps; But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos: 5:23–4). Immanuel Kant, famously, identified the holy with morality; in his *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*, he defines holiness as "the absolute or unlimited moral perfection of the will. A holy being must not be affected with the least inclination contrary to morality. It must be impossible for it to will something which is contrary to moral laws" (Kant 2001, p. 409). According to Otto, however, this rational element of the holy is to be contrasted with its non-rational element.

Two features are particularly significant about this contrast. First, the non-rational element in the holy is first and foremost apprehended through *feelings* and intuitions, and not through concepts. Moreover, *what* is apprehended – what Otto calls the numinous – is felt to have a sheer surplus of meaning that cannot be adequately expressed through concepts; at best the experience can be suggested by what Otto calls "ideograms," metaphors and analogies that point to the experience and that help to evoke it. (For criticism of the view that concepts are inapplicable to religious experience, see Chapter 48, Religious Experience.) Second, the idea of the holy is *synthetic*. Rational and non-rational aspects of the holy are not contained in one another, that is, one cannot, through an analysis of one element, derive or unfold the other. Otto dubs the rational elements of the holy "*synthetic* essential attributes." While we are certainly justified in predicating rational attributes to the holy, "we have to predicate them of a subject which they qualify, but which in its deeper essence is not, nor indeed can be, comprehended in them; which rather requires comprehension of a quite different kind" (Otto 1923, p. 2).

This kind of comprehension is what Otto calls "feeling"; through it the subject apprehends the *numinous* quality of the holy. For Otto, feeling is the faculty through which something that stands outside the self is *directly* and immediately apprehended. The feeling elements through which the numinous is apprehended are simply the direct effects, so to speak, of the numinous itself on our psychological constitution. The numinous is not to be confused with these feeling elements themselves, but is rather that which evokes such feelings to begin with. Key expressions associated with it in Western literature are the Hebrew *qadosh*, the Greek *hagios*, and the Latin *sacer*.

A large part of Otto's oeuvre consists of a compelling phenomenological analysis of the feelings presaging the numinous, which is experienced as a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. He first analyzes "*tremendum*," in terms of three distinct moments. These

are a) that of awefulness, b) that of overpoweringness, and c) that of energy or urgency. The three moments are intrinsically related and can easily pass over into one another.

Otto describes the element of awefulness as the sense of the absolute *unapproachability* of the numinous. This is well illustrated in the story of the burning bush in the Hebrew Bible. When God calls Moses from the burning bush, God adjures him, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground," and Moses is afraid (Exodus 3:5). This sense of the unapproachability of the holy brings with it a peculiar dread of a completely different nature from the fear that can be experienced of objects in the natural world. To mark something off as hallowed is to mark it off by this feeling of peculiar dread, which recognizes its numinous character. For instance, after Jacob receives the promise in a dream at Bethel he is afraid and exclaims, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Genesis 28:17). Significantly, the story marks the origin of the northern sanctuary at Bethel.

Otto notes that this feeling of dread is the starting point in the evolution of religion. It first begins as the experience of something "uncanny" or "weird." The feeling can take "wild and demonic forms and can sink to an almost grisly horror and shuddering" (1923, p. 13). Examples from the Bible include the *emah* of Yahweh (Fear of God), which Yahweh can pour forth to paralyzing effect. In the New Testament we find the strange idea of the wrath of God (ὀργή θεοῦ), analogous to the *ira deorum* of the Indian pantheon. As Otto notes, this *orge* "is nothing but the *tremendum* itself, apprehended and expressed by the aid of a naive analogy" (1923, p. 18). The analogy is naive because the notion of "wrath" implies purpose and emotion. But a closer analysis of the *tremendum* shows that no such purpose or emotion is involved, for the element of awefulness has two other features worthy of note. First, this *orge* is devoid of moral qualities. Second, the way that it is "kindled and manifested" is quite strange: it is "like a hidden force of nature, like stored-up electricity, discharging itself upon anyone that comes too near. It is 'incalculable' and 'arbitrary'" (1923, p. 18). The strange story of the Ark of the Covenant in 2 Samuel is illustrative: when Uzzah reaches out his hand to steady the ark, he is immediately struck dead (2 Samuel 6.6; see also the story in 1 Samuel, chapters 5 and 6). That the *tremendum* is experienced as such a force of nature is further evidence of the insufficiency of the analogy with the idea of "wrath," which has as its basis the idea of personal purposiveness.

Associated with the experience of awefulness is the experience of the *tremendum* as an overpowering might. Its concomitant is the feeling of the self as impotent, as a mere nullity, as something that is not entirely real. Abraham, for instance, refers to himself as "but dust and ashes" in the presence of the Lord (Genesis 18:27). Only the numen is felt to be absolutely real. This apprehension of the numen has both ontological and valuational components; the numen is not only that which is absolutely real, it is also felt as that which has absolute worth. This experience is at the heart of mysticism, which witnesses that the I is not essentially real, and which rejects the delusion of selfhood as manifested in the ego (see Chapter 83, Philosophical Reflection on Mysticism).

Lastly, partially implied by the experience of the *tremendum* as an overpowering might, but containing other elements as well, is the experience of the energy and urgency of the numen. This is the experience of the living God, of "a force that knows [neither] stint nor stay, which is urgent, active, compelling and alive" (1923, p. 24).

This energy is captured in the New Testament sayings “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31) and “indeed our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29). The energy of the numen is absolutely unendurable; even Moses cannot see the glory of God, but only God’s back, for “no one shall see me (God) and live” (Exodus 33:21). In love mysticism it is experienced as the fire of divine love that the mystic can hardly endure.

The horrifying images in chapter 11 of the Bhagavad-Gita are especially apt in capturing the awefulness, overpoweringness, and energy of the numen. When Aryuna desires to behold God himself in his own form, his petition is granted and he sees Vishnu “touching the heavens, glittering, many-hued, with yawning mouths”; people “hasting enter into thy mouths grim with fangs and terrible; some, caught between the teeth, appear with crushed heads.” And finally the grisly image spreads to include whole worlds: “Thou devourest and lickest up all the worlds around with flaming mouths; filling the whole universe with radiance, grim glow Thy splendours, O Vishnu!” The image conveys the absolute power of the divine over all finite being. This power is, however, like a force of nature; it is an all-consuming energy, its horrifying indifference to human purposes demonstrated by the fact that it consumes whole worlds containing both good and bad alike. After Aryuna has witnessed this, he asks to understand what he has seen, but the petition is not granted. What he has seen must remain incomprehensible to him. This brings us the next characteristic of the holy: its mysterious character.

The numinous is apprehended as *mysterium*: it is something that “strikes us dumb,” and that brings with it “amazement absolute” (Otto 1923, p. 26). It is “wholly other” (*ganz Anderes*) since it is immediately grasped as something that is of a completely different nature than anything that can be known by the “natural” individual. The *mysterium* is “that which is quite beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar, which therefore falls quite outside the limits of the ‘canny’ and is contrasted with it, filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment” (1923, p. 26). As such, the numinous completely transcends the categories of the mundane. Concepts that are applied to things in this world are only analogically applicable to it, for it is of a radically different order than the world or anything in it. While we can have a positive experience of it through feeling, it eludes all apprehension through concepts (Otto 1937, p. 87). Here lies the genesis of negative or apophatic theology stressing that all our concepts are inadequate to it. The concepts we use to refer to it, such as *mysterium*, are mere ideograms “for the unique content of feeling.” In order to understand these ideograms the person “must already have had the experience himself” (1937, p. 39). What the numinous is “cannot, strictly speaking, be taught, it can only be evoked, awakened in the mind; as everything that comes ‘of the spirit’ must be awakened” (1923, p. 7). All of this carries with it the implication that the category of the numinous is *sui generis*, that is, it cannot be reduced to other categories such as that of psychology or the social sciences that strive to understand the human being in merely naturalistic terms.

Despite its daunting character, the numen is also experienced as *fascinating*: it is an object of search, desire, and longing. As such, the numinous ultimately must be sought out, for only it will quench the deepest desires of the soul. Otto notes that

above and beyond our rational being lies hidden the ultimate and highest part of our nature, which can find no satisfaction in the mere allaying of the needs of our sensuous, psychical, or intellectual impulses and cravings. The mystics call it the basis or ground of the soul. (1923, p. 36)

The numen is ultimately experienced as the source of unspeakable bliss, one that is of a completely different order from natural happiness. Otto speaks of the “*wonderfulness* and rapture that lies in the mysterious beatific experience of the deity” (1923, p. 32), an experience which is beyond comparison with any earthly joys. This element of wonderfulness is vaguely apprehended at the very beginning of the religious quest, and is at the heart of the fascinating element of the numen. Otto also distinguishes between the *fascinating* element of the numinous and its *august* character. The numinous is fascinating insofar as it is of subjective worth to us; it is august insofar as it is recognized as possessing an objective and intrinsic value far surpassing anything that can be considered as having worth in the natural sphere (1923, p. 52).

### Influences on Otto's Thought

Important to understanding Otto's analysis of the holy is Kant's distinction between the two stems of human cognition, sensibility and understanding. This distinction lies at the foundation of Otto's distinction between the rational and non-rational aspects of the holy and grounds his phenomenological analysis.

In the introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant notes that “there are two stems of human cognition, which may perhaps arise from a common but to us unknown root, namely sensibility and understanding, through the first of which objects are given to us, but through the second of which they are thought” (1998, A15/B29). Through sensibility we intuit objects; through the understanding we think them, discursively, through concepts. Concepts and intuitions differ from one another in two important ways. First, concepts are *reflected* representations. As such, they are *mediate* representations since they never refer to an object immediately, but only to some characteristic of it that, in principle, it can share with other individuals. A concept, then, is a representation of a representation, since it can contain many individuals *under* it (its extension). Furthermore, a concept is the predicate of a possible judgment. Intuitions, on the other hand, relate *immediately* to their object, and in them a *singular* object is given. Second, while concepts are the product of the *spontaneity* of the understanding, for humans all intuitions are sensible and as such rest on *affections*.

The notion that the individual relates *immediately* to the Absolute, through intuition and feeling, is at the core of Friedrich Schleiermacher's understanding of religion, which had a significant impact on Otto's understanding of the holy. For Schleiermacher, who was also profoundly influenced by Kant, “intuition is and always remains something individual, set apart, the immediate perception, nothing more. ... The same is true of religion; it stops with the immediate experience of the existence and action of the universe, with individual intuitions and feelings” (1988, p. 26). If the subject is to grasp its relation to the absolute in all its *immediacy*, it can only do so through feeling, that

is, through its receptivity. Schleiermacher notes, famously, that religion is “the sensibility and taste for the infinite (p. 23) and that its essence is “neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling” (p. 22). This “feeling” is not one that occurs through the senses themselves, but rather through some deeper receptive faculty of the soul (Mariña 2008, pp. 109–45). In fact, for Schleiermacher as well as for Otto, this deeper receptive faculty can be identified with the *fundus animae*, the basis or ground of the soul so often referred to in mysticism (Otto 1923, pp. 36 and 112). Through the feeling of absolute dependence, according to Schleiermacher, we become aware of the “Whence of our active and receptive existence.”

In an important passage in *On Religion*, Schleiermacher notes:

All intuition proceeds from the influence of the intuited on the one who intuits, from an original and independent action of the former, which is then grasped, apprehended, and conceived by the latter according to one’s own nature. If the emanations of light – which happen completely without your efforts – did not affect your sense, if the smallest parts of the body, the tips of your fingers, were not mechanically or chemically affected, if the pressure of weight did not reveal to you an opposition and a limit to your power, you would intuit nothing and perceive nothing, and what you thus intuit and perceive is not the nature of things, but their action upon you. (1988, pp. 24–5)

Perception, then, depends upon the particular *capacities* of the individual to be affected in a particular way. Otto, well versed in the philosophy of both Kant and Schleiermacher, would not have missed the importance of this idea. His phenomenological analysis of the non-rational aspects of the holy has to do with how the numinous confronts the religious individual immediately and hence through feeling. The senses, however, cannot think, and herein lies the difficulty in relating the non-rational aspects of the holy to its rational aspects. Otto recognizes the provenance of each of the two elements comprising his analysis of the holy: its rational elements having to do with how the holy is thought, its non-rational elements having to do with how it is *felt*. This is why he brings in the idea of the schema, which in Kant’s philosophy mediates between sensibility and understanding. In the next section I assess Otto’s assertion that the non-rational elements of the holy are “schematized” by the rational elements.

### Possible Solution

Reflection on Kant’s two-faculty psychology reveals both the ingenuity of Otto’s analysis and the challenge involved in understanding the relation between the holy’s rational and non-rational elements. If Kant’s two-faculty psychology is correct, then it would make sense for the holy to be apprehended in one way through *feeling*, and in another way through *thought*. In each case a different set of features of the holy would be apprehended because of the different faculties involved in doing the apprehension. However, it would still be a single ultimate reality that is being experienced. Now, according to Kant’s two-faculty psychology, intuition is that faculty through which I *directly* apprehend particulars; through concepts I think of several individuals at once through a common attribute. The ethical sphere involves *concepts* under which many individuals

can be ranged, for instance, the concept that qualifies a being as an end in him or herself, or as morally considerable. Nevertheless, according to the Kantian system to which Otto is indebted, the two stems of human cognition must work together in order for cognition to be possible, sensation providing the matter, and cognition providing the form; as Kant so famously noted, “Intuitions without concepts are blind and concepts without intuitions are empty” (1998 A51/B75). How the material of sensation is made amenable to the functions of the understanding is one of Kant’s most difficult and obscure notions, involving both the schematism and the activity of the imagination. Roughly following Kant’s psychology, Otto suggests that the rational elements in the idea of the holy, which are themselves also *a priori*, eventually serve to “schematize” the non-rational elements (1923, p. 140). This rationalization and moralization of religion occurs quite naturally in the historical development of religions as human beings themselves develop rationally.

Critics of Otto’s analysis often complain of the unsatisfactory character of this move. Exactly how this process of schematization occurs is never explained. It must nevertheless be pointed out that Otto is correct to claim that as religion develops the moral imperative to treat others humanely emerges as a significant element within it. John Hick has cataloged the widespread character of the golden rule in world religions. Just a few of its formulations, he notes, are the following: the Buddha’s affirmation that “Life is dear to all. Comparing others with oneself one should neither strike nor cause to strike”; Confucius’ saying, “Do not do to others what you would not like yourself”; in the Taoist *Thai Shang* we find the words that the good man will “regard [others’] gains as if they were his own, and their losses in the same way”; and in Luke 6:31 we read: “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Hick 2004, pp. 309–14; see also Chapter 84, Religious Pluralism).

A significant problem stands in the way of understanding the relation of the moral demand within the holy to its non-rational elements: how are we to *derive* the command to love the neighbor from the character of the numen apprehended as a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*? Simply pointing to the different faculties involved in the apprehension of the holy will not get us very far. This is because the very *objects* of thought (or even the “materials” given to the receptive faculty, which are then ordered through the understanding) are in each case different: in the first case it is the neighbor, and in the second it is the numen itself.

It seems to me the only way to link the moral imperative to a valuational imperative stemming from the numen is to point to the numinous character of the soul itself, which is, in its depths, capable of reflecting the divine. Otto refers to the numinous character of the soul, maintaining that “the soul and its bottommost depth lie hidden away, ineffable as God himself,” and cites Gregory of Nyssa, who claims that “inasmuch as the nature of our spirit is above our understanding, it has here an exact resemblance to the all-sublime, representing by its own unfathomableness the incomprehensible Being of God” (1923, p. 194). As such, the other is *immediately* apprehended as a numinous being, for the presence of the absolute can shine through the spirit, and it is this that grants the individual his or her inestimable worth. Note, however, that here the material for the ethical imperative is intuited *directly*, in and through the felt presence of the other, although the value of this presence is felt to be directly linked to the value of the absolute itself. At this initial stage both the presence of the numen and that of the



neighbor are intuited immediately; in the case of neighbor-love the material for the moral imperative comes directly from the claim that the neighbor's presence makes upon me. What we have in the moral imperative taken *as* a divine command, then, is a conceptualization of these intuitions and feelings. This, I think, helps us to better understand the relation of the two great commandments, and makes more intelligible the interrelations between the rational and non-rational aspects of the holy.

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## Omnipotence

JOSHUA HOFFMAN AND GARY ROSENKRANTZ

According to the traditional idea of God, God is the greatest being possible. Traditional theism, as formulated in the Middle Ages by such philosophers as Anselm, Maimonides, and Thomas Aquinas (see Chapter 9, The Christian Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology; and Chapter 11, The Jewish Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology), maintains that God possesses certain great-making properties, such as omnipotence, omniscience, moral perfection, and necessary existence (see Chapter 28, Omniscience; Chapter 30, Goodness; and Chapter 33, Necessity). In the case of omnipotence, at least, there is biblical authority for including it among the divine attributes. Yet, reflection on the concept of omnipotence raises puzzling questions which concern whether or not a consistent notion of omnipotence implies limitations on the power of an omnipotent agent. Our goal here is to provide an account of the concept of omnipotence which resolves all of the puzzles surrounding this concept.

### What Omnipotence Signifies

One of the concerns of recent philosophy of religion is to investigate the coherence of the divine attributes, considered individually and in combination. Of course, omnipotence is one of these attributes.

According to some philosophers, omnipotence should be understood in terms of the power to perform *tasks*, for instance, to kill oneself, to make  $2 + 2 = 5$ , or to make oneself non-omniscient (see Chapter 36, Divine Action). Philosophical discussion has brought out that this approach to defining omnipotence is fruitless. More successful is that of philosophers such as Rosenkrantz and Hoffman (1980), Flint and Freddoso (1983), and Wierenga (1989) to define omnipotence in terms of the power to bring it about that certain *states of affairs* obtain. States of affairs in this sense are propositional entities that either obtain or fail to obtain. In what follows, when we speak of *bringing about certain states of affairs*, this is shorthand for bringing it about that these states of affairs obtain.

One definition of "omnipotence" is that of having the power to bring about *any* state of affairs whatsoever, including necessary and impossible states of affairs. René Descartes in the *Meditations* seems to have had such a definition. But, as Aquinas in his

*Summa Theologiae* and Maimonides in his *Guide of the Perplexed* recognized, it is not possible for an agent to bring about an *impossible* state of affairs (e.g., that there is a shapeless cube), since if it were, it would be possible for an impossible state of affairs to obtain, which is a contradiction. Nor is it possible for an agent to bring about a *necessary* state of affairs (e.g., that all cubes are shaped). It is possible for an agent, *a*, to bring about a necessary state of affairs, *s*, only if possibly: (1) *s* obtains; and (2) if *a* had not acted, then *s* would have failed to obtain. Because a necessary state of affairs obtains whether or not anyone acts, (2) is false. As a consequence, it is impossible for an agent to bring about either an impossible or a necessary state of affairs, and the first definition of omnipotence is incoherent.

According to a second proposal, omnipotence can be defined as *maximal power*, meaning just that the overall power of an omnipotent being could not be exceeded by any being. It does not follow that a maximally powerful being can bring about any state of affairs, since bringing about some such states of affairs is impossible. Nor does it follow that a being with maximal power can bring about whatever any other agent can bring about. If *a* can bring about *s*, and *b* cannot, it does not follow that *a* is *overall* more powerful than *b*, since it could be that *b* can bring about some other state or states of affairs which *a* cannot. This *comparative* definition of omnipotence as maximal power appears to be defensible.

*Power* should be distinguished from *ability*. Power is ability plus opportunity: a being having maximal ability who is prevented by circumstances from exercising those abilities would not be omnipotent. Nothing could prevent an omnipotent agent from exercising its powers, were it to endeavor to do so.

In the light of the foregoing, could there be two coexistent omnipotent agents, Dick and Jane? If this were even possible, then *possibly*, at some time, *t*, Dick, while retaining his omnipotence, attempts to move a feather, and at *t*, Jane, while retaining her omnipotence, attempts to keep that feather motionless. Intuitively, in this case, neither Dick nor Jane would affect the feather as to its motion or rest. Thus, in this case, at *t*, Dick would be powerless to move the feather, and at *t*, Jane would be powerless to keep the feather motionless! But it is absurd to suppose that an omnipotent agent could lack the power to move a feather or the power to keep it motionless. Therefore, neither Dick nor Jane is omnipotent. Since the idea that there could be two omnipotent beings who are *necessarily* always in perfect agreement is highly questionable, it seems impossible that there be two coexistent omnipotent agents. However, it might be objected that while neither Dick nor Jane brings about what he or she attempts to bring about, each of them *can* do so, since each of them has the *ability* to do so; they fail to bring about what they attempt to bring about only because they lack the *opportunity* to do so. But our earlier observations about the difference between power and ability and how each of them is related to omnipotence entail that omnipotence should be understood in terms of the ability *plus* opportunity sense of “can.” If those earlier observations of ours are correct, then, since neither Dick nor Jane *can* (in the ability plus opportunity sense) do what he or she attempts to do, the objection under discussion does not succeed.

Could an agent be accidentally (or contingently) omnipotent? At first glance, this appears possible, but there is the following argument for the opposite view. On the assumption that God exists, he has necessary existence, is essentially not temporally limited, and is essentially omnipotent. But there could not be two coexistent

omnipotent agents. Thus, on the assumption that God exists, an accidentally omnipotent being is impossible.

This argument against the possibility of accidental omnipotence presupposes traditional Western theism. However, traditional Western theism is highly controversial, and *neutrality* about whether God exists has some advantages. If one is neutral about whether God exists, then omnipotence should *not* be assumed to be attributable *only* to the God of traditional Western theism or *only* to an essentially omnipotent being.

## The Riddle of the Stone

The intelligibility of the notion of omnipotence has been challenged by the so-called paradox or riddle of the stone. Can an omnipotent agent, Jane, bring it about that there is a stone of some mass,  $m$ , which Jane cannot move? If the answer is “yes,” then there is a state of affairs that Jane cannot bring about, namely (S1) that a stone of mass  $m$  moves. On the other hand, if the answer is “no,” then there is another state of affairs that Jane cannot bring about, namely (S2) that there is a stone of mass  $m$  which Jane cannot move. Thus, it seems that whether or not Jane can make the stone in question, there is some possible state of affairs which an omnipotent agent cannot bring about. And this appears to be paradoxical.

A first resolution of the paradox comes into play when there is an *essentially* omnipotent agent, Jane. In that case, the state of affairs of Jane’s being non-omnipotent is impossible. Therefore, Jane cannot bring it about that she is not omnipotent. Since, necessarily, an omnipotent agent can move any stone, no matter how massive, (S2) is impossible. But as we have seen, an omnipotent agent is not required to be able to bring about an impossible state of affairs.

If, on the other hand, both (S1) and (S2) *are* possible, then it is possible for some omnipotent agent to bring it about that (S1) obtains at some time, *and* that (S2) obtains at a different time. Thus, there is a second solution to the paradox. This solution has a different presupposition than the first solution, namely, that there is a *contingently* omnipotent agent. In this case, Jane’s being non-omnipotent is a possible state of affairs, and we may assume that it is possible for Jane to bring it about that she is non-omnipotent. So, Jane can create and move a stone of mass  $m$  while omnipotent, and *subsequently* bring it about that she is not omnipotent and powerless to move that stone of mass  $m$ . As a consequence, Jane can bring about both (S1) and (S2), but only if they obtain at different times.

## Further Limitations on the Power of an Omnipotent Agent

It might now be conjectured that omnipotence can be defined as the power to bring it about that any contingent state of affairs obtains. However, the following list of contingent states of affairs demonstrates that this definition is inadequate.

- (a) A raindrop fell.
- (b) A raindrop falls at  $t$  (where  $t$  is a past time).

- (c) Parmenides lectures for the first time.
- (d) The Amazon floods an odd number of times less than four.
- (e) A snowflake falls and no omnipotent agent ever exists.
- (f) Plato freely decides to write a dialogue.

The first state of affairs (a) is in the past. As the “necessity of the past” implies, it is impossible for any agent to have power over the past. Hence, no agent, not even an omnipotent one, can bring it about that (a) obtains. Likewise, despite the fact that (b) can be brought about prior to *t*, the necessity of the past implies that even an omnipotent agent is powerless to bring it about that (b) obtains after *t*. In the case of (c), prior to Parmenides’ first lecture, an omnipotent agent has the power to bring about (c). But once he has lectured, even an omnipotent agent is powerless to bring it about that (c) obtains. As for (d), prior to the Amazon’s third flooding, an omnipotent agent has the power to bring it about that (d) obtains, while after the Amazon’s third flooding, even an omnipotent agent is powerless to bring it about that (d) obtains. A special difficulty is introduced by (e). Although it is obvious that (e) could not be brought about by an omnipotent agent, it can be argued plausibly, as by Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (1988), that it is possible for a non-omnipotent agent to bring about (e) by causing a snowflake to fall *if* no omnipotent agent ever exists. As we argued earlier, a maximally powerful being need not have the power to bring about every state of affairs that any other being can. Lastly, an omnipotent agent *other than Plato* cannot bring about (f) if the libertarian theory of free will is correct, but apparently a non-omnipotent agent, namely, Plato, can bring it about that (f) obtains (see Chapter 39, Providence).

Consequently, a satisfactory definition of omnipotence ought not to require that an omnipotent agent have the power to bring about (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), or (f), if it is assumed, *arguendo*, in the case of (f) that libertarianism is true.

The foregoing limitations on the power of an omnipotent agent are a consequence of (a)–(f)’s having certain modal and temporal properties; in what follows, we describe the nature of these modal and temporal properties in somewhat greater detail. To begin, an omnipotent agent ought not to be required to have the power to bring about a state of affairs unless it is possible for some agent to bring about that state of affairs. But (a) is not possibly brought about by any agent. Note that if an omnipotent agent is not required to have the power to bring about (a), because it is not possibly brought about by someone, then that agent is not required to have the power to bring about impossible or necessary states of affairs either. Second, (b) and (c) are possibly brought about by some agent. Yet they are not *repeatable*: it is not possible for either one of them to obtain, then fail to obtain, and then obtain again. If an omnipotent agent is not required to have the power to bring about (b) or (c) because they are not repeatable, then this is another reason why that agent is not required to have the power to bring about impossible or necessary states of affairs, since they are not repeatable. Third, (d) is repeatable, but it is not *unrestrictedly* repeatable, that is, it cannot obtain, then fail to obtain, then obtain again, and so on, eternally. Fourth, (e) is unrestrictedly repeatable. Yet it is a complex state of affairs: a conjunctive state of affairs whose second conjunct is *not* repeatable. A reasonable hypothesis about repeatability and its relation to power is that an omnipotent agent should not be required to have the power to bring about either a state of affairs which is not unrestrictedly repeatable or a conjunctive state of affairs one of

whose conjuncts is not unrestrictedly repeatable. Lastly, (f) is unrestrictedly repeatable. But (f) is identifiable with or analyzable as a conjunctive state of affairs. This state of affairs has three conjuncts, the second of which is not possibly brought about by anyone. The conjunctive state of affairs in question can be informally expressed as follows: Plato decides to write a dialogue; and there is no *antecedent* sufficient causal condition of Plato's deciding to write a dialogue; and there is no concurrent sufficient causal condition of Plato's deciding to write a dialogue. Because an agent could not have power over *the past*, the second conjunct of this state of affairs is not possibly brought about by anyone. Thus, an omnipotent agent ought not to be required to have the power to bring about a state of affairs which is identifiable with or analyzable as a conjunctive state of affairs one of whose conjuncts is not possibly brought about by anyone.

The definition of omnipotence as maximal power is compatible with there being limitations of the foregoing sorts on the power of an omnipotent agent. Moreover, we have argued elsewhere that by utilizing the concept of an unrestrictedly repeatable state of affairs, one can specify the subclass of states of affairs that an omnipotent agent has it within its power to bring about. For an attempt to construct and defend a technical formal analysis of omnipotence as maximal power in terms of the concept of an unrestrictedly repeatable state of affairs, see Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2006).

Note that while an omnipotent agent is *not* required to have the power to bring it about, for example, that the Nile River floods for the first time (when it has already flooded), such an agent is required to have the power to bring it about that the Nile River floods. This illustrates the fact that for many states of affairs that are *not* unrestrictedly repeatable, there are corresponding states of affairs that *are* unrestrictedly repeatable, and which, therefore, an omnipotent agent must have the power to bring about. In cases like these, it is plausible that there is no real diminishment of power in not requiring an omnipotent agent to have the power to bring about states of affairs that are not unrestrictedly repeatable.

## Are Divine Omnipotence and Moral Perfection Compatible?

It has been argued that the traditional God has incompatible attributes, namely, necessary existence, essential omnipotence, essential omniscience, and essential moral perfection (Pike 1969). The contention has been that it is impossible for God to have the power to bring about evil, while non-omnipotent (and morally imperfect) beings may have this power. The precise form of such an argument varies depending on what precisely the relation between God and evil is assumed to be. However, generally speaking, it is argued that divine moral perfection and omnipotence are incompatible because divine omnipotence entails that God has the power to bring about evil, whereas divine moral perfection entails that God is powerless to bring about evil.

One can respond to arguments of this kind as follows. Assume that if God exists, then this is a best possible world. In that case, if God exists, there could not be an evil unless it were necessary for some greater good, in which case any state of affairs containing evil incompatible with there being a maximally good world is *impossible*. As we have argued, it may be assumed that it is not possible for *any* agent to bring about an impossible state of affairs. Thus, if God exists, any moral evil, that is, any evil brought

about by anyone, and any natural evil, or any evil which has an impersonal, natural cause, must be necessary for some greater good.

Suppose that God exists and that some other person, for example, Cain, brings it about that an evil, *E*, exists. There are two possibilities that need to be considered here. The first is that Cain's decisions and actions are causally determined, as are all occurrences in the created universe. Then, given our assumptions, since Cain's bringing it about that *E* exists is necessary for some good which more than compensates for *E*'s existence, it is consistent with God's moral perfection that God (remotely) brings it about that Cain brings it about that *E* exists.

The second possibility is that Cain's decision to do evil is uncaused by anything other than Cain; that is, Cain's decision is free in the libertarian sense. In that case, God did *not* (remotely cause Cain freely to) bring it about that *E* exists, while (let us assume) Cain *did* freely bring it about that *E* exists. If so, then it must be the case that God's creating Cain and permitting Cain freely to do what he chooses to do (in the context of the entire creation) brings about more good than his *not* creating Cain and thus *not* permitting him freely to do what he chooses to do. It might be objected that if Cain can bring about a state of affairs that God cannot, namely, *that E exists*, then God is not omnipotent. But, as we have seen, an agent's being omnipotent does not require of that agent that it be able to bring about *every* state of affairs which *any* other agent can bring about. It *does*, of course, require that an omnipotent agent have more power than any other agent. And God, of course, *would* have more power than Cain, even though Cain could bring about something that God could not. For there are many more states of affairs that God could bring about and that Cain could not, than *vice versa*. At this point, it might further be objected that an omnipotent agent, one that was morally imperfect, who *could* bring it about that *E* exists, as well as all the other states of affairs that God could bring about, would be more powerful than God. But recall that if God exists, then he exists eternally in every possible world. Recall, too, that there cannot be more than one omnipotent agent. Thus, if God exists, then an omnipotent agent who is morally imperfect is *impossible*. Thus, this second objection is based on an assumption that is impossible, namely, that if God exists there could exist another omnipotent agent who is morally imperfect and who is therefore more powerful than God.

Of course, if God exists, then any evil state of affairs, *s*, which is incompatible with a maximally good world is *impossible*. And if *s* is impossible, then neither God nor any other agent has the power to bring it about that *s* obtains. God would lack the power to bring it about that *s* obtains because of his moral perfection, and any created agent would lack the power to bring it about that *s* obtains either because (i) God would not create an agent who had the power to bring it about that *s* obtains, or (ii) God would not permit any created agent to bring it about that *s* obtains. Thus, to the extent indicated, if God's attributes impose moral restrictions on the nature of the universe and on what he can bring about, then they impose parallel restrictions on what any other agents can bring about.

If the foregoing line of argument is sound, then it follows that God's moral perfection and omnipotence are compatible.

This argument about God and the possibility of evil has been disputed by theists such as Alvin Plantinga (1974), who do not hold that God's existence implies the existence of a maximally good world, but do hold that God seeks to create as good a world as God



can. Theists such as Plantinga allow for there to be evil that is not necessary for a greater good. An evil of this kind involves free decisions of non-divine agents, which God does not prevent, but which these other agents can prevent. Plantinga contends that God is not wrong to permit an evil of this kind, since God cannot bring about a vital good, the existence of free human agents, without there being such an evil. Alternatively, it might be argued that God does no wrong in this sort of case because he does not know how to do better (knowledge of the future free actions of created agents being impossible). However, as an omnipotent God is *not* required to have power over the free decisions of non-divine agents, it follows that in these views, his omnipotence and moral perfection are compatible, roughly to the extent indicated earlier in our discussion of the view that God's existence implies a maximally good world. Of course, nothing that has been said here answers the question of how much, if any, evil is compatible with the existence of the traditional God (see Chapter 58, The Logical Problem of Evil; and Chapter 59, The Evidential Problem of Evil).

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## Omniscience

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The doctrine that God is omniscient is an element in most orthodox Christian theologies. One source for the doctrine consists of biblical statements – e.g., Psalm 139, Hebrews 4:13 – which suggest a very wide scope for the divine knowledge. Perhaps another source is the conviction that without an appeal to omniscience one could not maintain a full confidence in God's ability to achieve his purposes in the world, including his purpose of redeeming and blessing his people. Probably the source which is most important philosophically, however, is that of "perfect being" theology.

One begins, that is, with some "high" concept of God – perhaps Anselm's idea that God is that being than whom no greater can be conceived, or René Descartes' suggestion that God is a being who has all of the perfections, or the claim that God is the being who is worthy of whole-hearted worship. One then goes on to speculate about what properties a being must have in order to satisfy the high conception. Many philosophers have supposed that knowledge is a good thing, an intellectual perfection, and the more knowledge the better. It seems attractive, then, to infer that a perfect being, the greatest conceivable being, etc., will have perfect knowledge. And perfect knowledge must be full knowledge, with nothing left out. And so one concludes that God must have an all-encompassing knowledge, a knowledge of every truth, of every fact.

In its categorical form, in which it is linked with the conviction that there actually exists a being who satisfies the high concept, this line of argument yields the conclusion that there is a being – God – who knows every truth. In its hypothetical form – independent, that is, of any assumption about the actual existence of a greatest conceivable being – the argument generates a hypothetical conclusion. It concludes, that is, that *if* there is a greatest conceivable being, then that being knows every truth.

The doctrine is usually formulated, as above, in terms of a knowledge of truths or facts – what is often called "propositional knowledge," or "knowledge that. ..." I have such knowledge when, for example, I know that today is Monday, that I grew up in Albuquerque, that the earth is larger than the moon, etc. In these cases the verb "to know" takes a "that-clause" as its object, where the clause which follows the word "that" is an expression which could stand alone as a complete indicative sentence, expressing a proposition with a truth value. There are, however, other uses of "know" in which it takes other kinds of objects. One can speak of knowing how to ride a bicycle,

for example. This kind of knowledge is not exhausted by knowing any set of facts, even a full set, about the activity in question. It requires that the knower have a certain skill – in the bicycle case, a neuromuscular disposition – which enables him or her to achieve a reasonable degree of success in the activity. One might also say of a destitute child, “She has known hunger throughout her life.” In that case we would probably mean that the child had often been hungry, had experienced hunger, throughout her life. And there may be still other senses for “know.”

Most theologians who accept the doctrine of the omniscience of God would probably not think themselves committed to the claim that God – a non-embodied being – has the neuromuscular skill of riding a bicycle, nor that he knows hunger in the sense of being hungry himself (see Chapter 34, Incorporeality). They would think that God knows every fact there is to know about bicycle riding and about hunger, all the truths about those subjects, but not necessarily that he has these other sorts of knowledge. The doctrine of the divine omniscience, that is, is a doctrine about “knowledge that ...,” a doctrine about propositional knowledge.

Perfect being theology, though a rich and powerful source of speculation about the divine nature, has its limitations. In particular, there is the difficulty of determining just which properties are perfections or “great-making” properties. Aristotle, for example, argued that there are some things – vile and despicable things – which it is better not to know than to know. He presumably would have thought it a defect in God, rather than a perfection, if he were to know all about my sins, etc. (Thomas Aquinas provided a special argument to circumvent this Aristotelian suggestion.)

In recent philosophical discussions three lines of argument have been advanced against the claim that God is omniscient. Two of these are of recent origin and are rather technical. The third goes back at least to medieval times and depends less on technicalities.

One of these arguments depends on the claim that there are some propositions whose expression involves the first-person pronoun “I,” and which cannot be expressed without that pronoun. It is argued, for example, that an accident victim suffering from temporary amnesia may know something which he can express by saying “I am in a hospital.” But, for instance, he may not know that Mr. Jones is in the hospital, even if in fact he is Mr. Jones. For he may not know that he is Mr. Jones. If there are truths of that sort, truths which can be expressed only as first-person propositions, then there are things which a person might know about himself or herself, but which it is logically impossible for anyone else – even God – to know. And if that is so, then God does not know every truth.

Not everyone, however, agrees that there are any such essentially first-person propositions. And if there are not, then of course this line of objection to the divine omniscience fails. For a further discussion of this argument see Swinburne (1977).

The second technical line of objection appeals to mathematical principles of the sort which Georg Cantor introduced in his discussion of the transfinite numbers. It is argued that if God knows every truth then there is a set of truths which God knows. But to every set of items there corresponds a “power set,” and the power set contains more members than the original set (even if the original set is infinite). Furthermore, every member of the power set must have at least one distinctive truth associated with it. Consequently, there must be more truths than are included in any set of truths. And

therefore no matter what set of truths a being knows, there is some truth which lies outside that set. The conclusion is that it is logically impossible that there exists an omniscient being. For a penetrating discussion of this line of argument, pro and con, see Grim and Plantinga (1993).

More generally, however, in connection with any argument whose conclusion is that a certain kind of knowledge, or a certain range of knowledge, etc., is logically impossible for a single being, there would seem to be a plausible reply which can be made in defense of omniscience. This sort of response is in fact commonly made by philosophical theologians in response to difficulties with the doctrine of divine omnipotence (see Chapter 27, Omnipotence). The latter doctrine initially seems to claim that God can do absolutely everything, since he is all-powerful. Can God therefore draw a square circle, make a mountain whose slopes run only uphill, etc.? At least since the time of Thomas Aquinas, most theologians have held that omnipotence need not be construed as a claim about the power to do logically impossible things. It is enough that omnipotence extend over the realm of the logically possible. That is what would be a perfection of power.

In a similar way, a perfect being theologian could argue that perfect knowledge would range over all those things which it is logically possible to know, but there is no need for it to encompass the things which it is not possible to know. And so if either (or both) of the technical lines of argument summarized above should turn out to be correct, then the doctrine of divine omniscience would be restated. The unrestricted reference to “all truths” would be replaced by “all the truths which it is logically possible for any one being to know,” or something of the sort. And it would be argued that such a power of knowing would be sufficient to satisfy the requirements for cognitive power, for being a perfect knower, in a high concept of God.

The third sort of difficulty which some philosophers find in the idea of divine omniscience goes back at least to medieval times. It does not allege that omniscience is logically impossible, but rather that it is logically incompatible with human free will. Jonathan Edwards (1957 [1754]) formulated a powerful version of this argument and summarized it as follows:

[I]f there be a full, certain and infallible Foreknowledge of the future existence of the volitions of moral agents, then there is a certain infallible and indissoluble connection between those events and that Foreknowledge; and ... therefore ... those events are necessary events; being infallibly and indissolubly connected with that, whose existence already is, and so is now necessary, and cannot but have been.

Consider, for example, something which is being done right now, apparently by free will, by a free choice. I am right now writing this paper (*w*), though (I suppose) I might have chosen to take a nap instead. But God, if he is omniscient, knew yesterday that I would now be writing (*k*). The Edwards line of argument can then be represented as follows:

- (1) Necessarily, if *k* then *w*.
- (2) Necessarily, *k*.
- (3) Therefore, necessarily *w*.

But if I am doing something *necessarily* then I have no choice about doing it. Since the action is necessary, I cannot avoid it. It cannot be a free action. It was already determined at least as far back as yesterday (and indeed, from everlasting to everlasting). So I have no real alternative to it now, and no real choice about it now.

If we wish, we can modify the argument above simply by replacing the word “necessarily” with the clause “I cannot now do anything about the fact that. ...” The logic of that analogous argument is the same as that of the original, and perhaps it brings out more clearly the intended connection with the possibility of a genuine human free will, of genuine choices.

The argument, as formalized above, is logically valid. That is, it is logically impossible that the conclusion be false if the premises are true. What do the two premises come to?

Premise (1) represents Edwards’ “infallible and indissoluble connection” between the divine foreknowledge and the events which are foreknown. It asserts a necessary connection between the divine foreknowledge of an event and that event’s actually happening. Edwards derives this premise from God’s necessary infallibility, and it does seem to follow from that. It also follows, perhaps more prosaically, from a rather common conception of knowledge (whether divine or human).

What about (2)? Taken without any modalizing expression, such as “necessarily” (or the analog which I suggested above), premise (2) is simply *k*. And that is just the claim that there is a divine foreknowledge of the act in question. It is just a special case of the doctrine of divine omniscience, here applied to a divine knowledge of some human act before that act is done; *k* is the substantive content of (2).

The modalization of (2) however – the introduction into it of necessity or some similar notion – is required for the validity of the argument. For the unmodalized version of (2) will not yield the modalized version of the conclusion. Instead, the conclusion which could validly be drawn would simply be *w* – which is just the observation that I am now writing this paper. In that case the necessity would have disappeared from the conclusion, and with it would have disappeared the suggestion that this conclusion is incompatible with genuine choices, free will, etc. The modalized version of (2), however, will support the modalized version of the conclusion.

Edwards defends the necessity in (2) on the grounds that the knowledge of God is *already in the past* – it is something “whose existence already is.” He says that “in things which are past, their past existence is now necessary: having already made sure of existence, it is too late for any possibility of alteration in that respect.” This principle, which seems crucial to the argument, is now often referred to as the “principle of the fixity of the past” (PPF). Premise (2), therefore, can be thought of as being a combination of two factors – the substantive element is the doctrine of omniscience applied to future events, and the modal element is provided by the PPF.

A variety of responses have been made to arguments of this sort. One may accept the core of the argument as it stands, holding that it is logically valid and that its premises are true, and that therefore its conclusion, (3), is also true. Some will go on to the further conclusion that there is therefore no human free will. This is a strong form of theological determinism. But it differs from other strong theological determinisms, in that the deterministic conclusion is not drawn from any theory or claim about the divine causation of events. This version of determinism does not appeal to God’s



power to cause or prevent future events, nor does it claim that future events are determined by *causes* which lie in the past. It is drawn, rather, merely from the divine *foreknowledge* of human choices, acts, etc. And it does not claim that the divine foreknowledge causes the future event.

Others who accept the core argument may go on to argue that there is a suitable sense of freedom which is compatible with determinism. If that is so, then human actions, such as my now writing this paper, can be free actions even if they are also determined and necessary. Compatibilist claims are common in connection with other forms of determinism, and they are also vigorously disputed by the partisans of “libertarian” conceptions of freedom. The contest between libertarian and compatibilist views is probably much the same in this context as in the others.

Philosophers who reject the core argument generally do so by rejecting premise (2) in one way or another. Since (2) includes two factors, and each of them may be rejected in more than one way, there is considerable variety in these contrary views.

Some philosophers reject (2) because they reject the substantive element in it. They claim, that is, that there are some things about the future which God does not know. At the very least, he does not know what the free actions of human beings will be. And so God did not know yesterday whether I would write this paper today or take a nap instead.

In turn, there are at least three ways in which this denial may be further explained or defended. Some philosophers appeal to an idea which seems to go back at least to Aristotle, the idea that future-tense sentences, at least if they refer to events whose determining causes are not already in the past, are neither true nor false – they have no truth value at all. They will come to have a truth value only when the event actually happens or the time for it passes, or when something else happens which will definitely cause or prevent the event. But if there was nothing yesterday which causally determined or prevented my choice and action today, then yesterday it was neither true nor false that I would write today. The divine omniscience, however, is said to be a knowledge of truths. If there was no truth yesterday about my actions today, then there was nothing relevant for God to know yesterday, and his failure to know what I would do today is not a failure of omniscience.

Some other philosophers hold that these future-tense propositions do have a truth value, and that God *could* know the true ones. But he voluntarily refrains from knowing them (perhaps in order to leave room for free will). On this view, omniscience is construed as a *power* of knowing, rather than as an actual knowing. God has this power, even with respect to future human choices, but he may not exercise this power in one or another particular case. This would be analogous to claiming that God, because he is omnipotent, is able to perform miracles. But in fact he does not perform every miracle which is within the range of his omnipotence. So also, on this view, he (voluntarily) does not know everything which lies within the cognitive power of his omniscience.

There seems also to be a (miscellaneous) third group of philosophers who deny that God knows all future human choices and actions, but who do not cite either of these reasons or explanations. For further discussion of these various ways of denying the “full” omniscience involved in premise (2), see Swinburne (1977).

The other element in (2) is the modality of necessity, and some philosophers deny this premise because they deny the modality (though they may accept the substantive element). This position also has several variants.

One variant holds that the substantive element in (2) is not a proposition about the past (or that it is not *wholly* about the past, etc.), and therefore the PFP does not apply to it. This variant itself has at least two subvariants.

One of these holds that God is an eternal being (rather than, say, an everlasting temporal being). As an eternal being, no temporal descriptions apply to him (see Chapter 32, Eternity). He has knowledge of all events, including those in the future (our future, that is, but not God's future), but none of this knowledge is *foreknowledge*. He does not know anything *before* it happens (or after it either). On this view an eternal being is, in some obscure and difficult sense, contemporaneous with every temporal event. So (2) is not a proposition about the past, and therefore it does not inherit any necessity on account of pastness. But there is no other reason for thinking that (2) is necessary. So we can reject the modality in (2). For further discussion of this idea of eternity see Stump and Kretzmann (1981).

The other subvariant makes no appeal to the alleged eternity of God, but distinguishes two (or more) sorts of propositions about the past. It is claimed that some propositions are *entirely* about the past, in the sense that they have no entailments about future events, etc. Other propositions may be *partially* about the past, but – if they have entailments about the future – they are partially about the future too. And it is then said that the PFP applies only to propositions which are *entirely* about the past. These are now often called “hard facts about the past.” If (2) reports merely a soft fact about the past, and not a hard fact, then the PFP does not apply to it, and there is no reason to think that it is necessary.

There has been a large amount of recent controversy about the right way to make the hard/soft distinction, what its significance is, etc. For further discussion and references see Zagzebski (1991).

Still another way of denying the modality in (2) (and the last to be mentioned here) is simply to deny the PFP. People who hold this view maintain (contrary to, say, Edwards) that the mere pastness of an event or state of affairs does not confer any necessity on it. If it does not inherit necessity from some other source then it simply is not necessary at all. It is a contingent element in the past history of the world, an event which might have been different from what it actually was.

Someone who holds this view would say that God indeed knew yesterday that I would write today. But why did he know *this*, rather than knowing, say, that I would be taking a nap right now? God did indeed have the knowledge that he had yesterday. But there was no inherent necessity that he should have *that* particular piece of knowledge, rather than have some alternative to it. What determined that God have that particular item of knowledge is my decision today to write rather than to nap. The particular features of the divine knowledge yesterday are determined by my choices and actions today.

If this is the way things are, then the divine foreknowledge about future human acts and decisions *depends* on those acts and decisions, and it imposes no constraint or necessity on them. If there are any such constraints, they must derive from some source other than the divine knowledge. For further discussion and references see Zagzebski (1991).

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## Omnipresence

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Omnipresence is naturally understood as being everywhere present. Thus, to say that God is omnipresent is to say that he is present everywhere. But what does it mean to say that God is present at a place, or at *every* place?

St Anselm, writing in the eleventh century, struggled with this issue. In chapter 20 of his *Monologion* he offered an argument for the conclusion that “the supreme essence” exists “everywhere and always.” In the following chapter, however, he argued that for God “it is quite impossible for it to exist everywhere and always.” Anselm then attempted to reconcile this “contradictory language – but ineluctable logic” by distinguishing two senses of “being wholly in a place,” namely, being *contained* in a place and being *present* at a place. In the first sense, a thing “X has a place if that place contains the extent of X by circumscribing it and circumscribes it by containing it.” Ordinary physical objects are thus contained in regions of space. In this sense, however, God is not in any place, for “Supreme Truth does not admit of the big and the small, the long and the short, which belong to spatial and temporal distention.” On the other hand, God *is* in every place in the sense that he is *present* at every place. In this sense, Anselm held that “it is necessary that [God] be present as a whole simultaneously to all places and times.” But this second sense of “being present,” the sense in which God *is* present in every place, is just the concept that was in question, and Anselm said very little explicitly to make it clearer.

St Thomas Aquinas added some details here. He agreed that God is present in space in a different sense from that in which ordinary objects are. But Aquinas further specified this sense, claiming that God’s presence is to be understood in terms of God’s power, knowledge, and essence (see Chapter 27, Omnipotence; Chapter 28, Omniscience; and Chapter 37, Creation and Conservation). More precisely, Aquinas held that “God is in all things by His power, inasmuch as all things are subject to his power; He is in all things by His presence in all things, inasmuch as all things are bare and open to His eyes; He is in all things by His essence, inasmuch as He is present to all as the cause of their being” (*Summa Theologiae* I.8.3). Aquinas’s illustration of this point is suggestive, if not entirely satisfactory. He held that

how [God] is in other things created by Him may be considered from human affairs. A king, for example, is said to be in the whole kingdom by his power, although he is not

everywhere present. Again, a thing is said to be by its presence in other things which are subject to its inspection; as things in a house are said to be present to anyone, who nevertheless may not be in substance in every part of the house. Lastly, a thing is said to be substantially or essentially in that place where its substance is.

This account of omnipresence in terms of power, knowledge, and essence follows an influential twelfth-century formulation set forth by Peter Lombard in his *Sentences*, 1, xxxvii, 1.

Perhaps a king may be said to be present wherever his power extends. At any rate, it is clear that Aquinas took this to be a kind of presence. In his *Summa contra Gentiles*, for example, Aquinas contrasted the “contact of dimensive quantity” that a physical object has to the place it is in with the “contact of power” that an incorporeal object has in a place, and he added that “an incorporeal thing is related to its presence in something by its power, in the same way that a corporeal thing is related to its presence in something by dimensive quantity” (see Chapter 34, Incorporeality). And he concluded that “if there were any body possessed of infinite dimensive quantity, it would have to be everywhere. So, if there be an incorporeal being possessed of infinite power, it must be everywhere” (*Summa contra Gentiles*, III.68.3).

The third condition Aquinas gave, that of presence by essence or substance, can perhaps be assimilated to the condition of power. If God is present in things by his essence “inasmuch as He is present to all as the cause of their being,” then it is in virtue of an exercise of his power, namely, creating and sustaining things, that he is present.

However, Aquinas’ explanation of his second condition, namely, presence through knowledge, is puzzling. The things in a house that are present in virtue of being “subject to inspection” seem a poor analogy for God, who, if anything, is more like the inspector than that which may be inspected. So perhaps Aquinas should be taken as holding that God is present everywhere in the sense that everything is open to his inspection (“bare and open to his eyes”), rather than that he is open in this way to others. Another way of putting this idea, then, is to say that God is present everywhere in virtue of his knowledge of everything in any place.

This way of conceiving of God’s presence by reference to his knowledge and power assumes that the predicate “is present” as applied to God is *analogical* with its application to ordinary physical objects. The term is neither univocal (used with the same meaning as it is in ordinary contexts), nor equivocal (used with a completely unrelated meaning). Rather, the meaning of “is present” or, better, “is present at place *p*” when applied to God, can be explained by reference to its ordinary sense, as follows: God is present at a place (in a special sense) just in case there is a physical object that is present at that place (in the ordinary sense) and God is able to control that object, God knows what is going on in that object, and God is the cause of the existence of that object.

Conceiving of God’s presence in this way, however, would seem to limit him to those places that are actually occupied by some object or other. Perhaps this is in fact what such philosophers as Anselm and Aquinas intended; Anselm, after all, said that “‘everywhere’ in the sense of ‘in everything that exists,’ is, as regards the truth, the more appropriate thing to say of the supreme nature” (*Monologion* 23). On the other hand, if God is present at places not otherwise occupied, the classical account can accommodate this simply by not insisting that “is present” as applied to God derives from the

literal presence of ordinary objects; it is instead to be defined in terms of God's knowledge of and power over what happens at every place.

Twentieth-century commentators on divine omnipresence have also held that God's presence is analogical. As Charles Hartshorne (1941) put it, "The relation of God to the world must necessarily be conceived, if at all, by analogy with relations given in human experience." But rather than taking divine presence to be analogical to the location in space of ordinary objects, philosophers like Hartshorne have assumed that God's relation to the world is analogous instead to a human mind's relation to its body.

Hartshorne held that among the things that human beings know, some are known immediately – by "vivid and direct intuition" – while other things are known only by inference. The former knowledge is infallible: it includes knowledge of one's own thoughts and feelings, as well as knowledge of changes going on in one's body. Since such immediate knowledge is the highest form of knowledge, it is the kind of knowledge God has. In God's case, moreover, he has immediate knowledge of the entire cosmos.

Hartshorne made similar claims about power. Some of what people have power over, they control directly. Other things can be controlled only indirectly or through intermediaries. Human beings have direct or immediate power only over their own volitions and movements of their own bodies. Again, however, since immediate power is the highest form of power, it is the kind of power appropriate to God. Accordingly, God has immediate power over every part of the universe. Hartshorne may thus be seen as elaborating the medieval view of divine omnipresence: God is present everywhere in virtue of having *immediate* knowledge and power throughout the entire universe. However, Hartshorne endorsed a surprising addition. He held that, by definition, whatever part of the world a mind knows and controls immediately is its body. He thus drew the conclusion that the world is God's body.

Richard Swinburne (1977) also approached the question of what it is to be an omnipresent spirit by asking what it is for a person to have a body. Swinburne's view differs from Hartshorne's in certain respects, but Swinburne, too, was willing to accept what he called a "limited embodiment" of God. Swinburne appealed first to the notion of a basic action – an action one does but not by doing something else. For example, raising one's arm is typically a basic action, whereas making the same arm rise by lifting it with one's other arm is not a basic action. According to Swinburne, God can move any part of the universe directly, as a basic action. Moreover, God "knows without inference about any state of the world." Thus, Swinburne concluded that the doctrine of divine omnipresence is the claim "that God controls *all* things directly and knows about *all* things without the information coming to him through some causal chain." This summary of Swinburne's position may be slightly inaccurate, because presumably Swinburne did not really mean to say that God controls directly the free acts of other agents. Perhaps, then, his thesis is that God *can* control directly what happens at any place (see Chapter 36, Divine Action).

It is, however, controversial to claim, on the basis of the knowledge and power Hartshorne and Swinburne each attribute to God, that the world is his body, even in only a limited respect. Charles Taliaferro (1994, p. 277), for example, notes that actions human beings perform directly (basic actions) "can involve highly complex physical factors ... [including] many neural events and muscular movements, whereas with God there is no such physical complexity." Taliaferro then adds that this immediacy in the



case of God's action is precisely a reason to say that "the world does not function as God's body the way material bodies function as our own." Another objection to saddling this account of omnipresence with the conclusion that the world is God's body is that, on the views of Hartshorne and Swinburne, God bears the same relation to unoccupied regions of space that he does to occupied regions. That is, for any place, God knows immediately what is happening at that place and he is able to control directly what happens there. It is surely unmotivated, then, to say of such a region that if there is some physical thing there then it is a part of God's body, when God would have the same epistemic access to that region and control over it if the physical object were not there. The presence of the object makes no contribution to God's abilities. (For a more sympathetic treatment of the suggestion that the world is God's body, without an explicit application to divine omnipresence, see Wainwright, 1987).

Hartshorne's view has a further implausibility, not shared with Swinburne's. Hartshorne attempted to attribute to God maximal immediacy with respect to knowledge and power. However, what he took to be immediate, at least in the case of knowledge, included both a more immediate and a less immediate component. Attributing only the more immediate component would better accord with Hartshorne's aim of ascribing maximal immediacy to God's knowledge. Doing so, however, undercuts Hartshorne's definition of one's body as whatever part of the world one's mind knows and controls immediately. This point needs explanation. Hartshorne had described immediate knowledge as infallible, indicating that it includes knowledge of one's own thoughts and feelings, as well as knowledge of changes in one's body. On the sort of mind-body dualism Hartshorne seems to presuppose, however, only the knowledge of one's own mental states would count as infallible. Knowledge of changes in one's body, dependent as they are on various causal processes, are neither infallible nor as immediate as knowledge of one's mental states. What one has the most immediate knowledge of, then, is not one's body.

A similar, although perhaps less convincing, point can be made with respect to power. According to Hartshorne, one's most immediate power is with respect to one's volitions and with respect to movements of one's body. In this case, too, control over volitions would seem to be more immediate than control over one's body, especially if voluntary bodily movements are causal effects of volitions. So what one has most direct control over need not be one's body.

Swinburne's view avoids this objection by defining immediate knowledge as information which does not come to the subject through a causal chain. Accordingly, it should follow that anything of which one has immediate knowledge is *not* one's body, since knowledge of our own bodies always arises through a causal chain.

If Swinburne's view of divine omnipresence is thus stripped of its admission of God's "limited embodiment," it seems to be the medieval view strengthened with the requirement that the knowledge and power that constitute God's presence be immediate or direct. In fact, however, the medievals also held that God's knowledge and power are immediate or direct, even if they did not emphasize this in their discussions of omnipresence. Thus, despite the fact that Aquinas spoke of things "being open to God's eyes," suggesting that God sees or perceives what happens in order to have knowledge of it, in fact Aquinas did not believe that God acquires his knowledge in this way. God does not acquire knowledge by being acted upon causally by the world. Rather, "he sees

other things, not in themselves, but in himself, inasmuch as his essence contains the likeness of things other than himself" (*Summa Theologiae* I.14.5). Moreover, God's omnipotence is an "active power of the highest degree" (*Summa* I.25.2), and this is naturally understood as direct or immediate power. Thus, Swinburne's explication of omnipresence as *immediate knowledge and power extending everywhere* may be seen as making explicit the standard medieval understanding of that divine attribute.

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## Goodness

PAUL HELM

In Judeo-Christianity and philosophical reflection upon it, "perfect goodness" may be thought of as a separately identifiable attribute of God, or as characterizing other divine attributes, or as that standard of value which only God can exemplify. God is said to be good in a wider or narrower sense; wider, when this indicates the fullness and completeness of his being, his self-sufficiency and freedom from want or deficiency of any kind. In this sense of "perfect goodness" it has the same reference as "perfect being," though a different sense. Divine perfection provides the conceptual link between being and goodness in God's case; God alone is, and can be, good. In the narrower sense God's goodness is an aspect of his moral character, and he communicates this goodness to his creatures in acts of creation and redemption. The source of these views lies in the scriptural ideas of the goodness of God (e.g., Psalm 119:68, Matthew 19:17) and of the creation (Genesis 1 : 1, Timothy 4 : 4), but the expression of them in philosophical terms, as well as some of the characteristic philosophical problems that the idea of divine goodness gives rise to, owes much to Neoplatonic influences flowing through such theological fountainheads as Boethius and Augustine.

Of these two senses, the metaphysical sense of "goodness" is the less familiar. In this sense, goodness is not a separate quality or property but, like existence, it transcends all the categories of being. Goodness is a property which belongs to every contingent being in virtue of being created, but especially to humankind, created morally upright. Since according to Judeo-Christian theism everything that exists contingently owes its existence to the creator, anything, to the degree that it exists, participates in the goodness of its creator.

So divine goodness is at the center of a complex web of ideas, linking together existence, createdness, and moral character. In this view it is better, though not necessarily morally better, to be than not to be; existence is an intrinsic good, even though the individual in question may be morally wicked. (The idea of evil as a deficiency may be regarded as a Platonizing of the scriptural idea of iniquity, a falling short of the mark.) At the point at which an individual became wicked to a completely unrelieved or unqualified degree he or she would no longer exist. There are kinds of being – necessary, contingent, insensate, sensory, and so on, and so kinds of goodness. For example the goodness of a material body, liable to decay, corruption, and death, is less good than the goodness of a spirit which, though existing contingently, has no such natural

liability. This matter may be expressed in terms of degrees of being, but it seems less plausible to suppose that something can more or less exist than it is to suppose that it may have a superior or an inferior kind of existence to something else.

In the moral sense of “goodness” God is said to be good in that he has no moral deficiency; his benevolence or justice or wisdom (or any other moral character or trait) are good in that they, in turn, are perfect exemplifications of these qualities, part of the excellence which he, as the supreme being, enjoys. In the Anselmian tradition of perfect being theology, God is said to be perfectly good in that goodness to a perfect degree is a necessary part of God’s overall perfection.

You are only one supreme good, altogether sufficient unto Yourself, needing nothing else but needed by all else in order to exist and to fare well. (Anselm 1974, ch. 22)

Now, one thing is necessary, viz., that one necessary Being in which there is every good – or better, who is every good, one good, complete good, and the only good (1974, ch. 23).

In this tradition, the metaphysical and the moral senses of goodness, though conceptually distinct, can be seen to come together in the following way. God is perfectly good not only in the senses described but also in that in him existence and essence are one. In God there is nothing that is unactualized. This reveals another feature of this idea of goodness, that it is telic in character. To be good is to realize one’s end. In God’s case, God necessarily realizes or fulfills it. Any contingent ends he may have do not achieve goodness, but express it. In the case of creatures, who necessarily participate in divine goodness, their good is to be on the way to achieving their end. This general thesis about goodness and purpose, when it is applied to human beings, yields a meta-ethic: to be morally good is to fulfill one’s potential.

There is a strong conceptual connection between the goodness of God and the fullness of his being, his self-sufficiency. This connection is made via the idea of God as the creator. For if there are created things that are good, and (following 1 Timothy 4:4) good because they exist, even though transient and perishing, then *a fortiori* their imperishable and eternal creator must be the supremely good, not supremely good because the creator is the best of a genus, but, being outside all genera, God is goodness itself. Thus Augustine:

This thing is good and that good, but take away this and that, and regard good itself if thou canst; so wilt thou see God, not good by a good that is other than Himself, but the good of all good. For in all these good things, whether those which I have mentioned, or any else that are to be discerned or thought, we could not say that one was better than another, when we judge truly, unless a conception of the good itself had been impressed upon us, such that according to it we might both approve some things as good, and prefer one good to another. (1872, bk. 8, ch. 3)

And Aquinas says that since God is “the primary operative cause of everything, goodness and desirability fittingly belong to him” (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia.6.1). What makes something good is that it ought to be desired and in God’s case is desired; the supremely existing and supremely good being is supremely desirable; lesser beings less so. So for

Aquinas the good and the desirable have the same reference, but a different sense (*Summa*, Ia.5). Another aspect of goodness is that it has the sense of completeness; God, being supremely perfect, is supremely good.

Some philosophers have resisted the consequences that would seem to follow from this, that God is necessarily good, on the grounds that if a property  $x$  is possessed necessarily by  $a$ , then  $a$  cannot be praised for having  $x$ . And since God is praised for having goodness, God cannot have that goodness necessarily. So they have argued that the being who is God is contingently good. But this reasoning is not altogether convincing. God is not praised for achieving moral goodness, or for retaining it, but for being it, as a beautiful landscape or a virtuous act may evoke expressions of admiration and praise irrespective of how they are brought about.

Tensions may be observed between other elements in this web of ideas. For example, if the goodness of created things and the divine goodness are linked, is a created thing good merely by virtue of having been created by God, regardless of what it is like? Put slightly differently, is a creature good simply by virtue of being created by God or because it participates in the divine goodness? At least in the case of humankind, which according to the Judeo-Christian tradition is created in the image of God, it is hard not to conclude that human goodness is such by virtue of certain created intrinsic features possessed by humankind.

Another tension concerns the relation between the divine goodness and the divine freedom. If God is all good, the fullness of being, what reason might God have for creating anything distinct from God's self? A standard answer to the first question is that goodness has a tendency to diffuse itself and the creation is a diffusion of the divine goodness.

Thus Jonathan Edwards:

God's disposition to cause his own infinite fullness to flow forth, is not the less properly called his goodness, because the good he communicates is what he delights in, as he delights in his own glory. ... Nor is this disposition, in God, to diffuse his own good, the less excellent, because it is implied in his love to himself.

Creatures, even the most excellent, are not independent and self-moved in their goodness; but in all its exercises, they are excited by some object they find: something appearing good, or in some respect worthy of regard, presents itself, and moves their kindness. But God, being all, and alone, is absolutely self-moved. The exercises of his communicative disposition are absolutely from within himself; all that is good and worthy in the object, and its very *being*, proceeding from the overflowing of his fullness. (1834, ch. 1, sect. 4)

But if this is so, how can we avoid the theologically unwelcome conclusion that the divine act of creation is not a free act, but that the creation is a necessary emanation from the fullness of the divine being?

The idea that goodness, and especially divine goodness, is essentially diffusive has played an important role in speculations about the internal coherence of the Christian doctrine of God as a trinity of persons. God is not a solitary, undifferentiated God; the goodness of God is thus exemplified in the life of reciprocal love of the divine tri-personal life. And this diffusive goodness is further seen in the creation of a universe in which exist individuals made in the image of God, and so capable of receiving and reciprocating that love.

Divine goodness may be said to represent an *a priori* standard of perfection to which actual goods may or may not attain. But what sort of standard is it? There are three main problems that arise in answering this question. The first is semantic. How does the goodness of God relate to the goodness of which men and women have a more ready experience, cases of human goodness? Is God, being good, good in precisely the same sense in which a particular human being, or human action, may be said to be good? Or is his goodness *sui generis*, unrelated, or perhaps only partly related, to human goodness? The second question is, if there is some positive relation, even if only an analogical relation, between divine and human goodness, is the goodness in question moral goodness, or goodness in some other sense? And third, if the divine goodness is moral goodness, what is the relevant standard of goodness? Does God set the standard of moral goodness in question, or does God's goodness merely follow or exemplify that standard? This question of whether God commands something because it is good, or something is good because God commands it is a special case of the more general question: does God decree the existence of X because it is good, or does the goodness of X consist simply in its being created by God? Let us look at each of these three questions in turn.

First, the semantic question. If God's goodness is totally unrelated to human goodness, then it is a misleading linguistic accident that the same word may be used of diverse things. If divine and human goodness have nothing in common, why call both *goodness*? It is sometimes argued that since God is not part of the human moral community no moral attributes of the sort that arise in that community can be ascribed to him. But if divine goodness and human goodness are equivocal, then what sense does it make to praise God for God's goodness? Why should God being good not be a reason for withholding praise? At the very least there is some explaining to be done.

Aquinas, among others, has stressed the need to distinguish between the order of being and the order of knowing. Creatures are good in so far as they participate in the divine goodness, but the divine goodness is known only by extrapolation from human experience of creaturely goodness (*Summa*, Ia.13.2). So there must be at least an analogical relation between divine goodness and human goodness; perhaps goodness in each case is being used univocally, each being conditioned by the respective metaphysical circumstances in which the goodness is exemplified. What it is for *x* to be good will not be the same as what it is for *y* to be good if *x* and *y* are instances of different kinds of thing. The goodness of God and of humankind are qualitatively the same, but human goodness, unlike divine goodness, is exemplified in a finite, contingent, and (in this life at least) a defective manner.

In the philosophy of Kant and philosophies influenced by him the goodness of God has a dramatically different character, and plays a radically different role. Goodness is not an essential part of divine perfection, the fullness of his being of which we may dimly become aware through the use of models or analogies. Rather, that God is good is not known, or knowable, but rather postulated by pure practical reason. It is a requirement for the rationality of human ethics that God be postulated as the *summum bonum*, as the rewarder of virtue and the punisher of vice. "But where do we get the concept of God as the highest good? Solely from the *Idea* of moral perfection" (Kant 1948 [1785], p. 73). The idea of a purely moral God exercises only a regulative role;



Kant can find no comparable role for any other, metaphysical, attributes of God, and so the God postulated has been fairly characterized as “purely moral.”

Once the goodness of God is disconnected from its scriptural and ontological roots, as it is in the philosophy of Kant and in the theologies of those who have been strongly influenced by him, there is scope to impute to God any of the varieties of goodness found in human life. Thus the goodness of God may be thought to lie in fulfilling an instrumental or organic function, or working to the advantage or pleasure of people, like a good knife or a good wine. Or perhaps God is good because God is good at a job, like a good salesman!

One answer to our second question has already been suggested. If the goodness of God is said to bear an analogical relation to what people regard as good, then which of the many sorts of goodness is this to be?

In contemporary philosophy of religion, most attention has been paid to the third question. For it appears to raise crucial issues of metaphysical and moral superiority and inferiority, a special case of the Euthyphro dilemma (see Chapter 68, Divine Command Ethics). Is some human action morally good because it exemplifies the moral goodness of God, or is God morally good because God’s character and actions exemplify human goodness? If God’s goodness merely follows some independent standard of goodness, then it appears that God’s sovereignty and independence are compromised; if God sets the very standard, by God’s command, then it appears that whatever God commands would *ipso facto* be good.

Various responses to this dilemma have been proposed. All solutions appear to allow for the distinction between positive and natural law, and to have no problem with the idea that God may command what is otherwise morally indifferent, for example, command a certain kind of priestly dress. The most prominent responses to the dilemma are the following.

Since moral values are metaphysically necessary, not even God can will or command what is evil. Since cruelty is necessarily evil, not even God can, by God’s command, make an act of cruelty permissible or obligatory. What God can do, by God’s command, is to emphasize the obligatoriness of certain particular actions in a given set of contingent circumstances. Thus by bringing about the contingent circumstances in which I have borrowed ten dollars, God may be said to make the act of the repayment of the money obligatory. In other circumstances, I may not have that particular obligation.

Another approach emphasizes the unity and simplicity of the divine character and argues that the distinction between the power and the goodness of God is artificial and inadmissible. As a simple being, God could not command, or propose to command, a course of action that is inconsistent with God’s moral nature. So no counterfactual of the form “what if God were to command an act of theft?” could be true. Others have argued that a divine command would only be a “live option” if it is believed to be the command of a loving God. Should this belief be unwarranted then the concept of what was ethically wrong would break down.

Whatever solution to the Euthyphro dilemma is favored, care must be taken to avoid the view that reflection on the character or commands of God cannot be the source of fresh moral insight. For it does not follow from the view that God can only will what is morally good, that each human being knows, in advance of God’s command, what

goodness requires in any given situation which he or she is likely to be confronted with. Necessary truths may be learned *a posteriori*, and so may the implications of the necessary truth (if it is one) that God commands only what is morally good.

The tension between divine goodness and divine freedom noted earlier surfaces again in connection with the problem of evil (see Chapter 58, The Logical Problem of Evil; and Chapter 59, The Evidential Problem of Evil). For if God is perfectly good, how, if God creates anything at all, could God fail to create the best of all possible worlds? Perhaps there is no best of all possible worlds, because, for any possible world, a better can always be imagined. Or perhaps possible worlds that God might create necessarily contain features which are incommensurable. But then why create *this* world?

There is only a problem of evil, a problem of why an all-good God permits or ordains evil, either natural evil or moral evil or both, if the goodness of God bears some similarity of character to human goodness. It is frequently assumed in modern discussions of the problem of evil that the divine goodness consists in benevolence which God intends to distribute equally to all God's human creatures. But perhaps, in this world and any world closely similar to it, an equal distribution of benevolence is impossible.

So the problem of evil, considered as an issue of logical consistency, is more or less acute depending upon what the moral values which comprise the divine goodness are thought to be. If divine goodness is divine equibenevolence, then the problem of evil is at its most acute, particularly if it is also held that whoever is benevolent must act for the immediate moral good of others. If, however, the divine goodness comprises other values in addition to or other than egalitarian benevolence, justice say, then the problem of evil is less acute; and it is even less acute if part of God's goodness is that God has obligations to others besides human creatures. Perhaps a good God has purposes wider than or different from those which are concerned with human happiness (the fulfillment of which is often thought to be the sole criterion of the operation of divine goodness), to which human happiness is subordinate.

What these reflections reveal is that the idea of goodness as a perfection of God, while being indisputable, is far too indefinite and vague an idea to be of real value in articulating divine goodness. Making it more precise may lead in one or more different directions. Not only is it impossible to derive one unitary concept of divine goodness from the idea of divine perfection, but there are, as we have seen, various concepts of divine goodness, each depending on the different values which such goodness is held to entail.

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## Simplicity

ELEONORE STUMP

### The Concept and Difficulties Associated with It

Among the traditionally recognized divine attributes regularly discussed by medieval theologians and accepted by them as part of orthodox religious belief, the strangest and hardest to understand is simplicity. Nonetheless, for all the difficulty of the doctrine of simplicity, philosophers and theologians in all three major monotheisms – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – have seen it as foundational for understanding the divine nature. In their view, God is an absolutely perfect being, and absolute perfection requires simplicity.

The doctrine of simplicity is the doctrine that God is one in a radical sort of way; a simple God lacks composition of any sort. The doctrine can be thought of as comprising four claims.

- 1 God cannot have any spatial or temporal parts.
- 2 God cannot have any intrinsic accidental properties.
- 3 There cannot be any real distinction between one essential property and another in God's nature.
- 4 There cannot be a real distinction between essence and existence in God.

These claims rule out composition in increasingly strict ways.

Claim (1), which is the easiest to understand, rules out the possibility that God is a physical entity or even is spatially locatable, as immaterial ghosts are sometimes supposed to be (see Chapter 34, Incorporeality). Claim (1) has also regularly been taken to imply that God is eternal rather than temporal: on the doctrine of simplicity, the life of a simple God is not spread out over time, any more than God is spread out over space (see Chapter 32, Eternity). Although the idea that God is not corporeal is familiar, not everyone finds the doctrine of God's eternality comprehensible or consistent. Some philosophers have supposed that an eternal God couldn't act in time, and some philosophers have argued that the notion of an atemporal life is incoherent.

Claim (2) presupposes the familiar distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic properties, or between real properties and Cambridge properties (as they are sometimes called). Although this distinction is widely used and often easy to apply, it is difficult to give a precise and satisfactory account of it. The basic notion behind it is, roughly, that a change in *s*'s extrinsic properties can occur without a change in *s*, while a change in *s*'s intrinsic properties is a change in *s*. The intrinsic properties of an abstract geometrical figure are all essential to it. On the doctrine of simplicity, God is like this, too, in the sense that none of his intrinsic properties are accidental. Like every other entity, however, God has extrinsic accidental properties, such as his being mentioned on this page.

The implications of claim (2) are, on the face of it, counterintuitive. They are also difficult to square with the traditional account of God, according to which God freely chooses to do some things, including respond to human free choices. So, for example, God has the property of being such that he freely answers the prayer Hannah freely chooses to pray by bringing about the birth of her son Samuel. But, according to claim (2), any such property is essential to God. Presumably, then, it is not possible for God to exist and not have such a property, and therefore God has no choice about whether he has it or not. It is hard to see, then, in what sense God's response to Hannah can be free or dependent on Hannah's freely choosing to pray her prayer.

Such difficulties are only exacerbated by claim (3), which denies the possibility of distinguishing one essential attribute of God's from another. From this claim it seems to follow that God's being such that he answers Hannah's prayer must be identical with any other attribute of God's, including, for example, being such that he talks with Rebecca about her pregnancy. Furthermore, any such attribute of God's will be identical with any of the more widely recognized divine attributes, like omniscience (see Chapter 28); and omniscience will be identical with omnipotence (see Chapter 27), which will also be identical with perfect goodness (see Chapter 30) and every other property of God's.

Finally, claim (4) makes it clear that all talk of attributes is misleading, on the doctrine of simplicity. If we could distinguish attributes within God, then we could also make a distinction within God between the existent God and the essence that God has. But according to claim (4), God is so radically one that there is no composition in him even of essence and existence. Consequently, God does not have an essence; instead, he is identical with his essence, and even his existence cannot be distinguished from that essence.

Many but not all of these apparently counterintuitive consequences can be warded off by clarifying the view of God's nature that the doctrine of simplicity is meant to express. On the doctrine of simplicity, it is misleading to think of God's answering Hannah's prayer as, literally, one of the things God does. Rather, strictly speaking, the one thing that atemporal God has is a variety of effects in time: a promise to Hagar at  $t_1$ , a conversation with Rebecca at  $t_2$ , and a response to Hannah at  $t_3$ . The absence of real distinction among divine attributes such as omniscience and omnipotence can be explained analogously. What human beings distinguish conceptually as divine omnipotence and omniscience is the single thing that is God but recognized by us under differing descriptions or in different manifestations. On the doctrine of simplicity, although all the designations for divine attributes are identical in reference, they are nonetheless

not synonymous but are rather different in sense, just as “the morning star” and “the evening star” are non-synonymous expressions designating the same thing under different descriptions or in different manifestations. Furthermore, that omnipotence and omniscience are different manifestations of the same thing doesn’t entail that power and knowledge are the same.

The most recalcitrant difficulties generated by the doctrine of simplicity are those that result from combining the doctrine with the traditional ascription to God of free will. How can it be both that God freely willed to create (see Chapter 37, Creation and Conservation), for example, and also that God has no intrinsic accidental attributes? If God freely willed to create, isn’t it the case that he might have willed not to create, so that there are possible worlds in which God doesn’t create? But if that is so, then God isn’t the same in all possible worlds; in some worlds, he has an attribute, namely, the attribute of being such that he creates, which he doesn’t have in other worlds. But then it does seem that God has intrinsic accidental attributes.

Part of the trouble here comes from combining the medieval terminology of the doctrine of simplicity with contemporary understandings of the same terms. Although Thomas Aquinas, for example, denies that God has any intrinsic accidental attributes, he does not mean that God is the same in every possible world in which he exists. For much of the medieval period, modalities were not thought of in terms of sameness or difference across possible worlds but rather in terms of branching timelines of the actual world. So, for example, although Aquinas sees God’s not creating as logically possible, God’s creating is nonetheless not an accident of God’s, but is rather necessary to him – in the sense that there is no branch of this world’s timeline on which not willing to create is correctly ascribable to God. For Aquinas, then, to deny that God has intrinsic accidents is to hold that God’s nature is immutably and determinately the same for all time in this world, not that it is the same across all possible worlds.

Someone might nonetheless object that the difference between those of God’s attributes which are the same in all possible worlds and those which aren’t marks a real distinction in God’s nature, between the metaphysical “softness” of willing to create, for example, and the metaphysical “hardness” of God’s omnipotence. It isn’t clear, however, that this conceptual distinction constitutes a metaphysical distinction in God. Although some of the objects of God’s will might have been different, it isn’t the case that there are parts of the divine will which are more mutable or less ineluctable than others (see Chapter 38, Immutability and Impassibility). What the conceptual distinction picks out is a difference in the ways in which God is related to himself and to other things, but being related differently to different things doesn’t entail that there are distinct intrinsic properties in God.

Many philosophers nonetheless suppose that these difficulties and others as well are fatal to the doctrine of divine simplicity. Some argue that the doctrine is incoherent, and others maintain that it is inconsistent with certain other traditionally held claims about God. To some philosophers, for example, a simple God seems to have more the nature of an abstract object than the character of a person. Still others suppose that there is no way of reconciling the doctrine of simplicity with the doctrine of the Trinity (see Chapter 82, Philosophical Reflection on Revelation and Scripture).



## The History of the Concept

The concept of simplicity can be found in Plotinus (see, for example, *Enneads* V.1–3), who attributes it to Parmenides and Plato, although it is perhaps more accurately attributable to earlier commentators on Plato. For Plotinus, the doctrine of divine simplicity is a powerful impetus to negative theology, showing that God is to be understood only in terms of what he is not, rather than in terms of any positive attributes which can be correctly applied to him. (The same impetus to negative theology can also be seen clearly in the use Maimonides makes of the doctrine [see Chapter 11, *The Jewish Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology*].) The Church Fathers also have a notion of simplicity and apply it to God. It or something ancestral to it can be found in Origen (see, for example, *Peri Archon* I.1.6). Athanasius supposes that accepting composition of essence and qualities in God will be generally shocking to the orthodox (*Epistola ad Afros Episcopos* 8).

The concept receives a good deal of attention in the work of Augustine, who combines the logic of Aristotle's *Categories* with Neoplatonic attitudes toward metaphysics and theology. So, for example, Augustine argues that in God there is none of the difference between accident and substance of the sort that characterizes creatures; rather, as Augustine puts it, God is what he has (*De Civitate Dei* XI.10). Augustine recognizes a worry about the compatibility of simplicity and Trinity, but he sees the difficulties more in the doctrine of the Trinity itself than in the combination of the two doctrines. According to the doctrine of the Trinity, God is three persons but only one substance; the persons of the Trinity are distinguished from one another only by relational attributes and not by any intrinsic essential or accidental properties, all of which are identical among the three persons. Augustine recognizes the perplexing nature of these claims, but he sees no special difficulty in holding that the one thing that all the persons of the Trinity are is itself simple (see, for example, *De Trinitate* VI.6–8).

Anselm takes any composition to be incompatible with aseity. If God is just because he has justice, then he has justice from something external to himself, on which he is dependent, Anselm thinks, and so he is not self-sufficient, contrary to what we suppose about the deity. Since similar considerations apply to any property attributed to God, Anselm holds that anything that can be truly said of God is the same as God's essence and that God is without any composition at all (*Monologion* 16–18). In the *Proslogion*, he deduces God's simplicity from the characterization of God as "that than which nothing greater can be conceived of" (*Proslogion* 12).

The culmination of medieval Latin discussions of simplicity comes in the work of Aquinas. In *Summa Theologiae* I.3, Aquinas presents the notion of divine simplicity by denying composition of God in increasingly strenuous ways. There is in God, he says, no composition of matter and form, so that God is not material. Furthermore, God is identical with his nature, and his nature is identical with his existence. Consequently, he has no accidents, and his essence cannot be divided into various attributes. In *Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia* he argues that although the words characterizing divine attributes refer to one and the same thing, they are not synonymous (I.7.6). Furthermore, although these terms cannot be predicated of God and creatures

univocally, it must not be thought that they are therefore predicated equivocally. Instead, they are predicated analogously, so that, for example, while divine and human justice cannot be defined in exactly the same way, divine justice is analogous to human justice.

Aquinas' account of simplicity is informed not only by the work of his Christian predecessors but also by a long tradition of philosophical and theological discussion among Jewish and Islamic philosophers. In the opening chapter of his work on the Mishnah Torah, Maimonides considers the command to the Jews to worship only one God. He sees the commandment not only as forbidding polytheism, but also as warding off wrong views of the nature of God. According to Maimonides, the commandment mandates ruling out any sort of composition in God. In *The Guide of the Perplexed* Maimonides spells out his interpretation of the doctrine of simplicity, including a denial of any distinction between essence and existence in God (chs. 14–18). Furthermore, he thinks that because God is simple, terms applied to God and creatures are used equivocally, and the only attributes which can be predicated of God, strictly speaking, are negative attributes. We are nonetheless not left without knowledge of God, because the negative attributes, in showing us what God is not, give us some significant information about him. Positive attributes customarily applied to God are to be understood in a negative way; so, for instance, when we say that God is living, what we should understand by this expression is that it is not the case that God is dead (ch. 18). Although Aquinas accepted a great deal of Maimonides' interpretation of simplicity, he rejected this way of understanding predicates applied to God and creatures.

Maimonides was himself reacting to an important controversy within Arabic philosophical theology (see Chapter 10, *The Islamic Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology*). Islamic philosophers (*falasifa*), such as al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroës, accepted the notion of divine simplicity, whereas the Muslim theologians (*mutakallamin*) tended to reject it. Avicenna went so far as to deny that God has an essence at all. Averroës rejected this view as well as related views of Avicenna, but he, too, emphasized the importance of divine simplicity. Averroës saw simplicity and Trinity as opposed to each other; allowing composition in God would, in his view, open the way for supposing that God is triune as Christians think, contrary to the Qur'an's insistence on the unity of God. Arguing against "the philosophers," al-Ghazali, on the other hand, thought he could demonstrate that there must be composition in God, at least the composition between essence and existence.

Even in the medieval Christian tradition there wasn't universal acceptance of the doctrine of simplicity. Although he was officially condemned for this view, Gilbert of Poitiers in the twelfth century held that there is a real distinction in God between his essence and his attributes. A century later, John Duns Scotus spoke of a "formal" distinction among God's attributes, which he thought allowed him both to admit the doctrine of simplicity and also to distinguish among divine attributes. Partly in consequence of this subtle weakening of the doctrine of simplicity, Scotus thought that some terms can be applied to God and creatures univocally. William of Ockham rejected Scotus's notion of a formal distinction, but he agreed with him that some terms can be applied to God and creatures univocally, and he maintained that we can properly cognize God's essence in a concept which is both proper to it and composite.

## Applications of the Concept to Issues in the Philosophy of Religion

The doctrine of divine simplicity makes a difference to several issues in the philosophy of religion, including the problem of the apparent incompatibility of omnipotence and impeccability, the seeming paradox of essential goodness, the question of God's relationship to morality, and issues related to the cosmological argument. Here I will focus just on the last two.

First, the question of God's relation to morality has typically been thought to have two possible answers. God's will is sometimes taken to create morality, in the sense that whatever God wills is good just because he wills it. This is the fundamental approach of divine command theories of morality (see Chapter 68, Divine Command Ethics). Alternatively, morality is taken to be grounded in principles transmitted by God but independent of him, so that a perfectly good God frames his will in accordance with those independently existing standards of goodness. Either of these answers seems to have a high cost attached to it. The first seems to make morality arbitrary, so that apparently anything at all could turn out to be moral (although there are sophisticated theories of divine command morality that attempt to avoid this implication). The second seems to deprive God of his sovereignty, since even God looks to standards external to him for morality. Furthermore, although this answer yields an objective morality, it does so at the cost of destroying any essential connection between morality and God.

If the doctrine of simplicity is coherent and consistent with other theistic doctrines, it can provide a third alternative. Because God is simple, he is identical with perfect goodness. Thus there is an essential relationship between God and the standard for moral goodness, and that standard is not external to God. On the other hand, because it is God's nature and not his will that is the standard, not just anything could turn out to be moral. For a simple God, then, the relation of God to perfect goodness is such that both God's sovereignty and the objectivity of morality are preserved.

Second, in the modern period, philosophers such as Gottfried Leibniz and Samuel Clarke rested their versions of the cosmological argument on the principle of sufficient reason (see Chapter 43, Cosmological Arguments). In their view, God is a necessary being, and unless we admit the existence of a necessary being, we will be unable to give a reason for the existence of something rather than nothing; in that case, contrary to the principle of sufficient reason, we will be saddled with a brute fact. One problem with this strategy for the cosmological argument is that it seems unable to account for the necessity of God's existence, which looks like a brute fact of a theological sort. If it is, then theists are in no better a position than atheists: each group has a brute fact it can't explain.

The doctrine of simplicity supplies what is lacking in versions of the cosmological argument such as Clarke's, namely, an explanation of the necessity of God's existence. Like properties, natures or essences exist in all possible worlds, if they are consistent. A simple God is identical with his nature, and so God's existence is necessary also. Someone might suppose that this line of argument just trades the brute fact of divine necessary existence for the brute fact of divine simplicity. But in fact the medievals thought that being simple is entailed by being absolutely perfect. According to them, absolute perfection requires absolute invulnerability and absolute independence, each

of which is incompatible with composition. Since they also held that “God is an absolutely perfect being” is as close as we can come to a definition of “God,” divine simplicity in their view is entailed by our very notion of God. Given the doctrine of simplicity, then, God is an entity whose necessary existence is self-explanatory in the sense that the explanation of it is provided entirely by the nature of the entity. Consequently, the doctrine of simplicity supplies what is missing in some modern versions of the cosmological argument. If God does not exist, then the search for an explanation of all contingent facts leaves at least one inexplicable contingent fact, namely, that there is something rather than nothing. But if there is an absolutely simple God, the chain of contingent facts has its ultimate explanation in a cause that is necessary and self-explanatory.

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## Eternity

BRIAN LEFTOW

Western theists agree that God is eternal. They disagree over what “God is eternal” asserts. The Old Testament seems to take “God is eternal” to say that

(BE) God exists without beginning or end, through everlasting time.

Influenced by Platonic philosophy, Christian thinkers came to treat “God is eternal” as

saying that God is timeless, i.e., that

(GT) God’s existence does not endure through, and has no location in, time.

(GT) profoundly alters one’s concept of God.

A timeless God does not remember, forget, regret, feel relief, or cease to do anything. For a timeless God has no past, and one can remember, forget, etc., only what is past. A timeless God does not wait, anticipate, hope, foreknow, predict, or deliberate. For a timeless God has no future, and one can anticipate, etc., only what is in one’s future. A timeless God does not begin to do anything, if one can begin to do only what one then continues to do. If timeless, God does not change: what changes first has, then lacks, some property, and so must exist at least two times. Thus a timeless God never learns or changes his attitudes or plans. All his knowledge and intentions are occurrent, not dispositional. Further, if God is timeless, there is no temporal gap between his forming a plan and executing it, or executing it and seeing all its consequences.

If timeless, God’s life lasts forever in the sense that at every time, it is true to say that, timelessly, God exists. Yet in itself, God’s life is neither long nor short. We may say that a timeless God is forever unchanging. But from his own perspective, he knows and does what he does in the flash of a single now. A timeless God lives his whole life in a single present of unimaginable intensity.

(GT) and its concept of God reigned unchallenged from Augustine to Aquinas. Duns Scotus was the first to break ranks on (GT). His example was contagious, and (GT)’s foes now far outnumber its friends. Some who deny (GT) argue that while God is in time, his time is unlike ours. Some say that it is “metrically amorphous,” i.e., that while events in God’s life take time, there is no determinate amount of time they take. Some claim that God’s time was amorphous until he created, at which point God entered ordinary time. Either proposal tries to save one benefit of (GT), that one need not say for how much of his life God waited before creating the universe.



Some argue that while God has a past, his “specious present” is unlike ours. To experience an extended event in one “specious present” is to presently experience a stretch of it, as when we seem to see motion. This seems to involve seeing a moving thing in a series of positions *in one present experience*, and so having a present perception which includes some of the moving thing’s immediate past states. This “specious present” encompasses for us perhaps 0.05 seconds of the object’s motion. God’s (some say) encompasses his entire life. This proposal seeks to save an implication of (GT), that in some sense God never ceases to live any part of his life.

Debate over God’s eternity has centered on whether to accept (GT). So I explore God’s eternity by first examining two reasons to affirm (GT), then considering reasons to deny it.

### Limits and Life

We begin and cease to live. Thus there are points in time beyond which we do not live: our life has limits. The writers of scripture see God as unlimited, free from creaturely constraints. Thus (BE) was their way to say that God’s life is boundless or limitless. Scriptural authors found it natural to gloss “without beginning or end” in terms of everlasting life in time.

Yet a life can have two kinds of limit. A life can have *outer* limits, a beginning or end. A life can also have *inner* limits, boundaries between parts, e.g., that between one’s first and second year. If a life lasts forever in time, always one part of it is past and another is future. So any life in time contains at least one limit, an inner boundary dividing its past from its future. This inner limit is as real a constraint as outer limits are. For it walls us off from parts of our lives. We no longer live what is past, but can only recall it. We have not even memory’s flawed access to our futures.

We are sometimes glad of this. Our pasts contain episodes it is good to be done with, and our futures contain events we might dread if we knew of them. But there are also past events we wish we could relive, and future days we are eager to see. Now God is perfect, and so lives a perfect being’s life. What is a perfect being’s life like? Plausibly, no part of such a life is on balance miserable: each part’s balance of good and evil, or the qualities of its specific goods, are such that on balance, the perfect being is better off living that part of its life than not living it. If this is true, having a past and a future would be at best an only partly compensated loss for God. In not living part of his life, God would lose some good involved in living it. If God is on balance better off living than not living each part of his life, the loss of any evils that part of his life brings him would not wholly compensate for the loss of that good. Thus having a past and a future would limit the perfection of God’s life.

Some suggest that this does not follow if God’s “specious present” holds his whole past and God has perfect predictive knowledge or literal prevision of his future. But as time passes, we regret losing not just vivid experience of events but the events themselves – losing parts of our own lives. A continuing hallucination of the past would content nobody who knew that what seemed to be happening really was not. This holds *a fortiori* for a future one has yet to live at all. And what would it say about God if it

made no difference to him whether we lived with him or ceased to exist, as long as his memory/prevision of us was intact?

Such thoughts have led many to hold that if God is a wholly perfect being, he has no past or future. If he does not, God is not in time. Note that if he is not in time, (BE) remains true. For only temporal lives begin or end. A life's beginning is earlier than its end, and any life with parts earlier than other parts is temporal.

## The Creation of Time

Theists think that God is the source of whatever is not God. Time is not God. So theists want to see God as the creator not just of temporal things, but of time itself. This does not require theists to say that time is an independent thing, a container of events which exists whether or not filled. For God might create time *by* creating temporal things. If (say) for time to exist is for there to be events related as earlier and later, God may create time by causing such events to occur, or causing the existence of beings which do so. Whatever time's precise status, though, theists want to trace to God not just concrete things, but the most general conditions under which concrete things exist, time and space themselves.

Most theists think that God's creative activity is wholly free. As part of this, most think God is able to refrain from all creating. If he is, and time is a creature, it is possible that God exists even if no time exists: God is at least possibly timeless, and had he created nothing, he would have been timeless.

If this is so, the real question about God and time is whether God becomes temporal by creating time. This can seem true. If God exists and a minute goes by, it is natural to infer that God existed through that minute. All the same, we might want to resist this inference.

"God becomes temporal" suggests that God's life has first a timeless and then a temporal part. But God cannot first be timeless, then later be temporal. For then God's timeless phase is earlier than his temporal phase, and whatever is earlier than something else is in time. Nor can God be timeless during the time he is temporal. If  $t$  is a time at which God is timeless (as distinct from a time at which it is true to *say* that God is timeless), then God's timeless state, supposedly not earlier than anything, is earlier than every time after  $t$ . So the most "God becomes temporal" can mean is that God's life always consists of two temporally disconnected parts, one of which would not have existed had he not created time. But this is not what "God becomes temporal" tries to say. It tries to say that "before" there was time, God was timeless and not temporal, and once there was time, God was temporal and not timeless. What we have found is that there is no coherent thought here to express.

A second try at saying that making time makes God temporal goes this way: God is never anything but temporal, but he is only contingently so, and is so because he is always making time. This view also faces problems. If time is God's free creation and God is contingently temporal by making time, presumably God decided to be temporal. He could not have done so timelessly, for then he would have had to become temporal. But then when did he decide? If he did so at any time, it was then too late. As he was already *at* that time, he was already temporal.

But the temporalist has a reply here. It is that God's decision to become temporal would not have been temporal save for God's deciding to become temporal. Because God decided to make time, there came to be events or times later than this decision. So the decision came to *have been* temporal. Had God not decided to make time, nothing would have been later than this decision. This decision would then have been atemporal. So it is God's decision which accounts for his being in time.

This move works only at the price of denying (BE). Consider the instant of God's life which supposedly is temporal but could have been timeless. This instant either is or is not the first of God's temporal life. If it is not, then God was temporal before this instant. If so, a decision located at this instant can account for God's being temporal only by being effective *before* it occurs, i.e., by a backward causal relation which brings it about that God was temporal before he decided to be. This is unacceptable. If the instant in question is the first instant of God's temporal life, God's life has a beginning, and so (BE) is false. Without (BE), God's life is not temporally unlimited. So this temporalist reply saves God's creation of time only by giving up temporalism's version of the claim that God is eternal.

It seems, then, that if God is eternally temporal, God cannot have decided to create time. But if not, and time is something God creates, then God cannot have decided to create *simpliciter*, i.e., to create anything rather than nothing. For at any time, he has already created something – time – without having decided to do so. But then God's creating *simpliciter* seems neither intentional nor free. Again, most Western theists think that God could have refrained from creating *simpliciter*. If God is eternally temporal and time is something God creates, it has always been too late for God to refrain from creating *simpliciter*. He may always have had the power to exist without a creation, but he has never had the opportunity to use it. However, when theists say that God was able to refrain from creating, they seem to mean that he had both power and opportunity.

Conjoined, then, (BE), the claim that God creates time, and the claim that God could have refrained from creating *simpliciter* seem to yield (GT). For it is not clear that God could become temporal by creating time.

## Problems for Timelessness

Critics of (GT) argue that features of the Western theist concept of God require that God exist in time. Such arguments as these are current:

- a God is alive. But living involves changing. So God must change. Only beings in time can change. So God is in time.
- b God is alive. Lives are events. Events must occur in time. So God is in time.
- c God coexists with temporal things. So God's properties change: first he coexists with Abraham and not Moses, later with Moses and not Abraham. So God is in time.
- d God is omniscient (see Chapter 28, Omniscience). Thus God knows what time it is now. But only someone who exists now can know what time it is now. For whoever knows that it is now noon can say with truth, "it is now noon." But only at noon can someone say this with truth. So God is in time.

- e If God is omniscient, he knows human actions which to us are future. If he is essentially omniscient, he cannot hold a false belief. If God is timeless, his knowledge cannot change, or depend on temporal events: what is eternal is as fixed as what is past. Were we to do other than God believes we will, either God would come to hold a false belief, or we would change God's timeless knowledge, or God's timeless knowledge would have been different because our temporal action was to be different, and so would have depended on our temporal action. Hence we cannot do other than God believes we will. So if God is timeless and essentially omniscient, we are not free. But we are free and God is essentially omniscient. So God is in time.
- f If God is timeless, all he knows, he knows at once. So either his knowledge is all prior (in some non-temporal sense) to all temporal events or it is all (non-temporally) posterior to all temporal events. If the first, matters are as in (e). If the second, God knows what he does because temporal events turn out as they do. If so, his knowledge comes "too late" for him to interfere providentially in time (see Chapter 39, Providence). God knows that Hitler kills Jews by seeing it happen. What one sees happen, one is too late to prevent. By contrast, if God is temporal, we are free, yet he can predict what we are likely to do and (if he chooses) act in time to save us or our victims.
- g God acts. Actions are events. Again, events must occur in time.
- h God is a cause. Either causal relations link only events, or they also link agents to events ("agent causality"). If the first, then as events occur only in time, God is in time. If the second, the agent's action is dated at the time of the effect. So if God has any temporal effects as an agent cause, he is again in time.
- i God interacts with temporal things: we pray, he hears and responds. If God first hears, then responds, he hears before he responds. So he hears and responds in time.
- j God became incarnate. So events in God's life have temporal dates. Whatever lives through temporally dated events exists in time.
- k If God loves his creatures, he reacts appropriately to their present suffering: it pains him. In the final state of things, "the Kingdom of Heaven," creatures no longer suffer, and so if God is perfectly rational, he feels less pain than is appropriate while they suffer. So if God always loves his creatures and is perfectly rational, God changes between now and then. If God timelessly beheld both present suffering and future happiness, his single, changeless overall state of feeling would be inappropriate to at least one of them.

Limits of space preclude my tackling all of these arguments. I choose to address the metaphysical worry behind (b), (g), and (h), that only occurrences in time can be events. I do so by exploring some arguments for this conclusion.

One might argue that:

- (1) Necessarily, any event which is a change in the things to which it happens occurs in time;
- (2) Necessarily, all events are such changes;
- (3) So necessarily, all events occur in time.

But theists deny (2). Theists hold that God has created some things *ex nihilo* (from nothing). This cannot be a change in the things created, for they do not exist before being created.

Again one might reach (3) from

- (4) Necessarily, any event which occurs before or after another event occurs in time, and
- (5) Necessarily, any event occurs before or after another event.

But (5) is false. The mereological sum of all events is an event. So is the existing of all of space-time. No event occurs before or after either. One might reach (3) from

- (6) Necessarily, any event with parts which follow one another occurs in time, and
- (7) Necessarily, all events have such parts.

But (7) is false. Consider a car continuously decelerating from 10 mph to zero. The car cannot do this without at some time having a speed of 5 mph. If the deceleration was continuous, though, the car was at 5 mph for only an instant. So the car's traveling at 5 mph was an instantaneous event, one without parts.

One might reach (3) from

- (8) Necessarily, any event which either follows or precedes another event or has parts which do so occurs in time, and
- (9) Necessarily, any event follows or precedes another or has parts which do so.

But (9) appears false. Many think it a live possibility that there be a topologically closed space-time, one structured like a circle, not a line. No event would occur before or after the existing of all of such a space-time, or the sum-event of its events. But neither event would have parts before other parts. The "before" relation is asymmetric (if A is before B, B is not before A) and irreflexive (A is never before A). Suppose, then, that space-time has a circular structure. If A and B are points in a circular space-time, then by proceeding around the circle in the direction time goes, we get from A to B and from B to A – time does both if it completes a circle from A back to A. Thus if in such a case A is before B, B is also before A and A is before itself. So in a circle-like space-time, nothing is before anything else.

Finally, one might reach (3) from

- (10) Necessarily, every event has a date and
- (11) Necessarily, every date is the date of a temporal event.

Chisholm explicates the concept of an event without supposing that events have dates (Chisholm 1990). If his account is coherent, it is not clear why (10) should be true. Further, arguably (11) is false: eternity is itself a date.

A date is an answer to the question "when?" Asked when God knew that he would speak to Moses, a Hebrew Bible author might well have replied "eternally" or "from eternity." These answers give dates. Effectively, they say "at every earlier time." Later thinkers took (GT) as their account of God's eternity, but continued to see "eternally"

as answering “when.” Boethius’ *De Trinitate* details the way statements about God fall into Aristotle’s categories. When he turns to the category of “when,” Boethius takes “God exists always” as his sample statement and explicates it in terms of God’s timelessness (Boethius 1926, p. 20). The shift to a different doctrine of divine eternity did not change the question the doctrine answered. Thus if events require dates, “eternally” will serve.

If the arguments surveyed fail, it is not clear why one should deny that something atemporal could count as an event. Nor need the concept of a timeless happening cause pain. An event is something that happens at some present. An eternal event is just one which happens at a peculiar present, the eternal present. In a less liberal sense, an event is something *new* that happens. However, nothing is earlier than God’s life if God is timeless. So for any *f*, if God is timelessly *f*, God is *f*, and nothing was/before God was. So arguably, God’s eternally being *f* has the newness we associate with a happening. We do not think of it thus because we tend to think of whatever is eternal as infinitely old. What is old has a long past. But what is timeless cannot be old. There is no past in eternity.

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## Necessity

WILLIAM E. MANN

Philosophical reflection on theism has produced two controversial theses connecting the concepts of God and necessity. Many theists, emphasizing the difference between God and creatures, have insisted that although the existence of creatures is a contingent matter, God's existence is necessary. Some theists, in an effort to stress God's sovereignty over everything, have claimed that God's creative activity is responsible not only for all contingent matters, but also for all necessary matters. Taken separately, each thesis has drawn philosophical criticism. Taken together, they appear to be incompatible. If God's existence is necessary, then there would seem to be at least one necessary truth for which God is not responsible – the truth that God exists necessarily. Someone inclined to defend both theses must be prepared to argue that God's necessary existence is compatible with God's complete sovereignty. Philosophical assessment of the theses requires analysis of the notion of necessary truth.

Prospects are bleak for producing a definition of necessary truth that does not presuppose the concept under definition (Adams 1983). For example, the characterization of a necessary truth as a proposition,  $p$ , whose negation entails a contradiction is doubly indebted to the concept. For what distinguishes a contradiction from other types of proposition that might be entailed by the negation of  $p$  is the fact that a contradiction is *necessarily false*, a notion scarcely intelligible apart from the notion of necessary truth. Moreover, the relation of entailment employed in the characterization is such that for two propositions,  $q$  and  $r$ ,  $q$  entails  $r$  if and only if it is *impossible* for  $q$  to be true and  $r$  false, that is, if and only if the conjunction of  $q$  with the negation of  $r$  is necessarily false. This kind of definitional circularity does not seem to be vicious. It may merely be symptomatic of how fundamental the notion of necessity is to our thought. Even without a definition, most people believe that some propositions are true necessarily. Tautologies – sentences like “Either the earth has an atmosphere or the earth does not have an atmosphere” and “If the atomic number of gold is 79, then it is not the case that the atomic number of gold is not 79” – appear to constitute the clearest examples. Other putative but more controversial cases of necessary truths include “ $1 + 2 = 3$ ,” “Everything that is red is extended in space,” and “All cows are ruminants.”

Despite the presumptive case in favor of necessary truths, some philosophers have found reason for questioning whether any proposition is necessarily true, especially if there is an omnipotent God. It will be convenient to examine the issues in the context



of Gottfried Leibniz's imagery of possible worlds (see Mates 1986, chs. 4 and 6). Many contemporary philosophers have characterized contingent truths as propositions that are true in some possible worlds and false in others, while necessary truths, if there are any, are propositions true in every possible world. This characterization still involves circularity if the explication of the notion of a possible world involves, for instance, the concept of a maximally consistent set of propositions, because propositions  $p$  and  $q$  are consistent if and only if the conjunction of  $p$  and  $q$  is not necessarily false. Even so, the notion of possible worlds has heuristic value, emphasizing that necessity involves invariability throughout all possible situations.

Several remarks made in the writings of René Descartes (for texts, see Frankfurt 1977; Curley 1984) have led interpreters to ascribe to him the doctrine that whether there are or can be any necessary truths depends somehow on God's omnipotence (see Chapter 27, Omnipotence). Let us call the general principle that God's omnipotence makes a difference to the status of necessary truths "the Cartesian principle." Its most radical version is the thesis that there are no necessarily true propositions if an omnipotent God exists. That  $1 + 2 = 3$  is true is as contingent upon God's omnipotent creative activity as is the proposition that grass is green. If we inject Leibniz's idiom of possible worlds into this version of the Cartesian principle, we can say that according to it, no proposition is true in every possible world. There are worlds God could have created in which  $1 + 2 \neq 3$ . Because this version of the Cartesian principle entails that every proposition is such that there is some possible world in which it is true and some possible world in which it is false, Alvin Plantinga has called this version *universal possibilism* (Plantinga 1980). A slightly more modest version of the Cartesian principle maintains that some propositions are necessarily true and exempt from God's unlimited power, although perhaps not the proposition that  $1 + 2 = 3$ . Obvious candidates are propositions that express necessary truths about God's existence and nature. This version of the Cartesian principle might maintain, for example, that God cannot fail to exist, to be omniscient, and to be omnipotent; that in every possible world it is true that God exists, is omniscient, and is omnipotent. Yet another version of the Cartesian principle maintains that although some propositions are necessary, they are necessary because God conferred their necessity on them: no proposition is *necessarily* necessary. If no proposition is necessarily necessary, every proposition is possibly possibly true (and possibly possibly false). Plantinga has called this position *limited possibilism*. It can be understood in the following way. Suppose that not every world is possible relative to every other possible world. It might then be the case, for example, that although a proposition is true in every world possible relative to the actual world, there are still other worlds, not possible relative to the actual world but possible relative to some of the worlds that *are* possible relative to the actual world, in which the proposition is false. There are consistent systems of modal logic that allow for this sort of case. Perhaps the best way of interpreting limited possibilism is to connect its notion of possibility to conceivability. In making the proposition that  $1 + 2 = 3$  necessary, God has made it, and us, such that we cannot conceive how it could be false. That is, in every world conceivable by us, " $1 + 2 = 3$ " is true. In some of the worlds conceivable by us in which " $1 + 2 = 3$ " is true, however, there are beings with conceptual capacities different from ours who can genuinely conceive " $1 + 2 = 3$ " to be false. It is important to stress that these beings' capacities are *genuine* capacities: it is not merely that they *think* that they

can conceive 1 plus 2 not equaling 3; they can successfully comprehend what it would be like for 1 plus 2 not to equal 3. These beings thus have conceptual access to worlds in which “ $1 + 2 = 3$ ” is false. In this situation, then, although “ $1 + 2 = 3$ ” is necessarily true (true in every world conceptually accessible to us), it is not necessary that “ $1 + 2 = 3$ ” be necessarily true, that is, “ $1 + 2 = 3$ ” is not true in every world conceptually accessible to beings, conceivable by us, who have conceptual capacities that we cannot fully comprehend. (Philosophical literature on the relationship between possibility and conceivability is very rich. See Gendler and Hawthorne 2002.)

One may suspect that the Cartesian principle, which promotes divine omnipotence over necessary truth, is misguided. If the goal of the Cartesian principle is to present a conception of a God who can do or have done literally anything, then not only has that goal not been attained, but each of the three versions of the principle presents reasons for thinking that the goal is unattainable. If universal possibilism is correct, then there is one large class of things that God cannot do or have done, namely, make any truth to be a necessary truth. In particular, God cannot make it necessarily true that  $1 + 2 = 3$ , or that he exists or is omnipotent. If limited possibilism is true, then although God can establish some truths as necessary, he cannot make any truth to be necessarily necessary. On the analysis of limited possibilism that identifies possibility with relative conceivability, even if God cannot conceive himself as not existing, God can conceive of beings with conceptual capacities different from his who can genuinely conceive of him as not existing. These beings thus can do something that God cannot do.

Nor will it help to seek refuge in the position that exempts only some truths, including truths about God’s existence and nature, from the class of truths that are contingent upon God. For this position sustains for a vast number of propositions the same criticism that applies to universal possibilism: try as he might, God cannot make or have made “ $1 + 2 = 3$ ” into a necessarily true proposition. Moreover, the position must provide an account of what it is that makes the exempt truths exempt. Simply to stake out truths about God’s essence and existence is too *ad hoc* a procedure. But to the extent to which the position might allow for necessary truths about other kinds of entities – for example, sets or numbers – the position will approximate to commonsense intuitions about necessity but raise anew questions about the scope of God’s omnipotence.

An alternative to the Cartesian principle is to attempt to explicate divine sovereignty over necessary truth by appealing not to God’s omnipotence but rather to God’s mental activity. Elements of this view can be found in the thought of St Augustine and perhaps also in Leibniz. Although Leibniz’s imagery includes the vision of God choosing from among the infinitely many different possible worlds which world would be actual, that is, which world God would create, the imagery does not require that possible worlds exist independently of God. One could maintain, as Leibniz comes close to maintaining, that possible worlds are merely conceptual entities residing in the divine mind. Centuries earlier, Augustine had identified the Platonic Forms – the abstract, perfect exemplars of concrete things and properties which concrete things and properties deficiently resemble – with *ideas* in the divine intellect (see Chapter 9, The Christian Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology). Augustine’s doctrine and Leibniz’s tendency can be viewed as examples of a theistic strategy that would make the existence of abstract objects depend on the divine mind. Let us call the strategy the *Augustinian strategy*, recognizing that instances of it, such as Leibniz’s tendency, might

never have been thought of by Augustine. If propositions are the bearers of truth and falsity, and if propositions are themselves abstract objects, then on the Augustinian strategy, for a proposition to exist is just for it to be thought by God. (The strategy can be tailored to accommodate St Thomas Aquinas' view that although normal human knowledge is propositional in content, God's knowledge is not. Aquinas believes that because propositions are complex objects and God's mode of knowing is simple both in its operation and in its representational content, God does not know by means of propositions. (One can on Aquinas' behalf express more perspicuously the thesis that propositions exist only in the mind of God by maintaining that whatever it is that provides the grounds for the existence of propositions in human knowledge exists in the mind of God.)

Although the Augustinian strategy accounts for the existence of propositions by lodging them or the entities on which they depend in God's mind, it does not account for the distinction between contingent and necessary propositions. Can one consistently maintain that although all propositions depend on God's activity for their existence, some propositions nevertheless cannot fail to be true (and some propositions cannot fail to be false), no matter what? It would appear that a positive answer to this question requires that the proposition that God exists itself be necessarily true. For if God could fail to exist, then, on the hypothesis that all propositions depend on God for their existence, God's non-existence would be a circumstance under which propositions would also fail to exist. If one assumes that no proposition can be either true or false if it does not exist, then it follows that if God can fail to exist, no proposition can be necessarily true (or necessarily false), that is, no proposition can be true in every possible world (or false in every possible world). The Augustinian strategy applied to propositions thus seems to entail that if it is possible for God to fail to exist, then universal possibilism is true. (The converse also seems to hold: if universal possibilism is genuinely universal, then it applies to the proposition that God exists, entailing that there are possible worlds in which God does not exist.)

The Augustinian strategy must explain how it can be that there are truths that are genuinely necessary which depend, nonetheless, on God's mental activity for their necessity. Let us begin by asking how the strategy might depict the relationship between God and contingent propositions. As a result of creating the actual world, God acted in such a way that a number of propositions became true – for example, the proposition that the earth is the third planet from the sun – and a number of propositions became false – for example, the proposition that the moon has an atmosphere. We need not suppose that these propositions somehow existed before God's creative act made them true (or false). Nor need we suppose that the act of creation is simply or even primarily a matter of making propositions true. In particular, followers of Aquinas might want to say that the portrayal of creation as making certain propositions true is an artifice of human intellects, whose understanding is propositional in nature. Bearing these caveats in mind, we can continue by supposing that the strategy depicts God's creative activity with respect to the contingent features of the world as God's *choosing* which propositions would become true and which would become false. Choice, we may suppose, is an operation whose input is beliefs and desires and whose output is action. A proponent of the strategy will most likely want to make two observations, at a minimum, about divine beliefs and desires. First, God's beliefs cannot be false or incom-

plete, and thus God's choices cannot suffer from the cognitive deficiencies of being erroneous or based on ignorance. Second, although it would be presumptuous to claim to know the exact content of God's desires in choosing to create, a defender of the Judeo-Christian tradition will insist that God's desires are directed toward the good. Leibniz is notorious for carrying the second observation to its logical extreme, arguing that since God is perfect, God would choose only the best; it follows that the actual world must be the best possible world. Other accounts of God's goodness have denied the assumption behind Leibniz's claim, namely, that perfect goodness entails maximization. But theistic dissent from Leibniz's view has not consisted in denial of the fundamental point that God's desires are desires for the good (see Kretzmann 1991; Mann 1991).

The Augustinian strategy can thus account for the truth and falsity of contingent propositions by making actual truth and actual falsity depend on God's creative choosing, a choosing that is cognitively perfect and directed toward the good. The strategy would thus maintain that a proposition,  $p$ , is contingent if and only if whether  $p$  is true or false depends on God's choice. But this thesis does not in itself show how the *contingency* of contingent propositions depends on God. Nor does the thesis in itself guarantee that the Augustinian strategy is independent of the Cartesian principle. Let us take the latter point first. It would help to show the independence of the Augustinian strategy from the Cartesian principle if one could show how God's freedom of choice grounds contingency without lapsing into universal possibilism or limited possibilism. One might begin by noting that the account of divine choice sketched above precludes some propositions from being possibly true, *if* propositions about God's existence and nature are necessarily true. Not only will the proposition that God does not exist be necessarily false, but so also will the proposition that God creates an irredeemably corrupt world. Many theists will not find these consequences unwelcome. One might continue by pointing out that God's being responsible for the contingency of contingent propositions need not be understood to entail that there is some proposition,  $p$ , that is in fact contingent but might have been necessary. Two of the consequences of standard interpretations of modal logic are that (1) any proposition that is possibly necessary is necessary, and (2) any necessary proposition is necessarily necessary. The first consequence rules out universal possibilism. (Recall that universal possibilism asserts that no proposition,  $p$ , is necessarily true. If  $p$  is not necessarily true, then the contrapositive of (1) entails that it is not possible that  $p$  be necessarily true. But if that is so, then it follows by the interdefinability of possibility and necessity that it is necessary that  $p$  not be necessarily true, a result that establishes a necessary truth, contrary to universal possibilism.) The second consequence obviously rules out limited possibilism. The Augustinian strategy can pay respect to standard modal logic by allowing that not even God could have promoted a contingent proposition into a necessary proposition. A defender of the Augustinian strategy can claim instead that the dependency of contingent propositions on God's activity can be illustrated by appeal to the asymmetry of explanation. An analogy may be helpful. Given Newtonian mechanics, one can deduce the period of a pendulum from the pendulum's length. Because the relevant mathematical operations are symmetrical, one can also deduce the pendulum's length from its period. It is obvious, however, that the pendulum's length explains its period, not vice versa. In similar fashion, a defender of the Augustinian strategy can claim that for any true contingent proposition,  $p$ , although " $p$  is contingently true" and "God chooses that

$p$  be true and could have chosen that  $p$  be false" entail each other, it is the latter claim that explains the former, not vice versa.

Further articulation of the Augustinian strategy would require showing how this particular explanatory asymmetry is embedded in a general theistic theory of God and the world. But we have enough before us now to see how the Augustinian strategy might explicate the relation between God and necessary truth. We may suppose that every necessary truth is necessarily necessary, and that just as God cannot have altered the status of a contingent proposition, so God cannot have altered the status of a necessary proposition. Because the necessary truths cannot vary across possible worlds, the Augustinian strategy cannot explicate their relation to God in terms of choice, if choice presupposes the ability to have chosen otherwise. Most theists would agree that if God is omniscient, then for any necessarily true proposition,  $p$ , " $p$  is necessarily true" and "God knows that  $p$  is necessarily true" entail each other. The distinctive contribution of the Augustinian strategy is to insist that it is God's knowing that  $p$  is necessarily true that explains  $p$ 's being necessarily true rather than the other way around. It is not that God's intellectual activity *discovers* that  $1 + 2 = 3$ . But neither is it correct to say that God's activity *invents* the truth that  $1 + 2 = 3$ , if invention entails either that the truth came into existence at some time or that it might have been false. God thoroughly understands that  $1 + 2 = 3$  with a sweep of intellectual comprehension that sees all the implications of that truth for all the rest of the truths. In understanding " $1 + 2 = 3$ " in this way, God understands something about himself as the supremely rational being. The necessary truths occupy an important place in the structure of rational thought. According to the Augustinian strategy, the structure of rational thought is either the structure of the divine mind or the divine mind itself, actively and essentially engaged in thinking.

One important class of necessary truths, according to the tradition informing the Augustinian strategy, are truths about God's nature. For example, God is necessarily or essentially omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good. Any being who lacked one of these attributes, or who possessed one of them only accidentally, would not be God. (Defenders of the tradition typically insist that these sorts of attributes cannot be possessed accidentally.) If, in addition, God's existence is necessary, it follows that God cannot nullify his own existence or abrogate his essential attributes: God exists and is omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good in every possible world. On a theology based on the Cartesian principle, these consequences can appear to place limitations on the divine power and make God depend on his attributes for his being what he is. The Augustinian strategy can embrace the consequences while dispelling the appearance of limitation by deploying the following two tactics. One is to argue that, surface grammar to the contrary notwithstanding, propositions like "God cannot cause his own non-existence" do not specify any real restriction on God's power. The other is to argue that, unlike created beings, the metaphysical distinction between a substance and its attributes does not apply to God. God is perfectly simple, in such a way that the expressions "God," "Perfect goodness," and "God's perfect goodness" do not refer to three things but rather to one thing specified in three ways. In this case, then, God does not *depend* on perfect goodness; God *is* perfect goodness itself (see Chapter 31, Simplicity).

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## Incorporeality

CHARLES TALIAFERRO

Traditional forms of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam each conceive of God as an immaterial, nonphysical reality. If “the incorporeality of God” means the denial that God is physical, then all three monotheistic religions accept the incorporeality of God. However, if we follow the etymology of the term and define “incorporeality” as “without body” (from the Latin *incorporale*), Christianity takes exception to a strict adherence to belief in God’s incorporeality when it comes to the Incarnation. According to traditional Christianity, in the Incarnation, the second member of the Trinity (see Chapter 66, Theism and Technology) became infleshed (the Latin meaning of *incarnātus*) and thus, in a sense, came to be “with body.” While this pivotal claim about the union of God and man at the heart of Christianity marks a dramatic departure from a radical transcendent theology of God according to which any such union is metaphysically impossible, it does not commit Christians to denying God’s immateriality. In traditional Christianity, God the Father, God the Holy Spirit, and God the Son (apart from the Incarnation) are clearly understood as lacking material structure and composition. Because of the shared conviction that God is immaterial, Christians along with Jews and Muslims have historically opposed material conceptions of God or gods such as one finds in Stoicism, according to which God is a vast material being, a world soul or animal, and in polytheism, according to which there are hosts of material deities. God’s immaterial reality has also been used to articulate an important difference between monotheism and versions of pantheism (see Chapter 40, Pantheism) according to which the material world either is God or a part of God. (For advocates of divine incorporeality outside of religious monotheism, see Chapter 8, Ancient Philosophical Theology.)

In this chapter I understand the claim that God is incorporeal to mean that God is not material. A “corporealist” maintains God is a material reality, while an “incorporealist” maintains God is immaterial. I follow the common, current practice of treating “material” and “physical” as synonyms, though it should be noted that it was once customary to use “material” to refer to matter alone and “physical” to cover both matter and energy. There will be three sections in what follows. The first considers reasons that have been advanced on behalf of divine incorporeality. The second considers objections to these arguments and the project of articulating a corporeal view of God. In a final section, I consider a version of divine incorporeality that may accommodate an important motivation behind corporealism.



## Arguments for Divine Incorporeality

While “incorporeal” is a negative term, marking God’s *not* being material (or *not* having a body), it has been advanced by philosophers and theologians on the basis of arguments from a wide range of positive attributions to God, namely God’s necessity (see Chapter 33), eternity (see Chapter 32), immutability (see Chapter 38, Immutability and Impassibility), omnipotence (see Chapter 27), simplicity (see Chapter 31), goodness (see Chapter 30), and omnipresence (see Chapter 29), and on the basis of the belief that God is not a being, but being itself. Divine incorporeality has also been defended on the basis of the testimony of revelation and scripture (see Chapter 47, Miracles) and religious experience (see Chapter 48). These arguments are advanced in light of certain theories about the material world and human nature. Many of the traditional theistic arguments in natural theology, the ontological (see Chapter 42), cosmological (see Chapter 43), and teleological and design arguments (see Chapter 44), have all been formulated as arguments for believing there is an immaterial God. The concept of the incorporeality of God is therefore at the intersection of many divine attributes and it plays a central role for theistic conceptions of God’s relation to the cosmos. Its place is so embedded in theistic philosophical literature that incorporeality is sometimes cast as a defining characteristic of God, such that the proposition “God is incorporeal” is treated as analytically true rather than as a proposition entailed by other, more central theistic claims. As we shall see in the next section, it has also been a pivotal target for anti-theistic philosophers who argue that the very idea of an incorporeal God is conceptually absurd.

Consider the eight pairs of attributions below. If it is plausible to believe any one set of these joint attributions according to which something is true of God that is not true of the material world as a whole nor any of its parts, then it is plausible to believe that God is not the material world as a whole nor any of its parts. Arguments may be strengthened to deliver a more robust conclusion, should one have reason to believe that these pairs describe essential properties. That is, if you believe God is essentially eternal and the material world is essentially not eternal (or essentially temporal), then you may conclude that it is impossible for God and the material world to be the very same thing. In either case, the reasoning rests on the principle of the indiscernibility of identicals (if A is B, then everything true of A is true of B).

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God necessarily exists.	Neither the material cosmos as a whole nor any of its parts necessarily exists.
God is eternal.	Neither the material world as a whole nor any of its parts is eternal.
God has no beginning.	Neither the material world as a whole nor any of its parts is without a beginning.
God is immutable.	Neither the material world as a whole nor any of its parts is immutable.
God is omnipotent.	Neither the material world as a whole nor any of its parts is omnipotent.
God is simple (i.e., God contains no parts).	Neither the material world as a whole nor any of its parts is without parts.
God is perfectly good.	Neither the material world nor any of its parts is perfectly good.
God is Being.	Neither the material world as a whole nor any of its parts is Being.

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Arguments based on these incompatible attributions may be spelled out in different ways. Thus, the argument from simplicity above is based on the notion that God is not a compound. The simplicity of God can be given other interpretations, however, one of which is that there is no distinction between subject and attribute in God. Granted that there is always such a distinction in material things, the appeal to this understanding of divine simplicity provides an additional reason for concluding that God is not material. Arguments from God's perfect goodness also allow for different versions. "Perfect goodness" may be analyzed as supreme value or maximal excellence (see Chapter 25, Perfect Being Theology and Chapter 30, Goodness). Divine incorporeality may then be advanced on the basis of the belief that God has such supreme value or maximal excellence and the material world either does not or cannot. Alternatively, the argument can be shifted to fit an analysis of "perfect goodness" in terms of not being subject to corruption. If material things are subject to corruption and God is incorruptible, then God is not a material thing. Such a construal of the argument would make it similar to (though not the same as) the argument from necessary existence noted first on the list.

Historically, many of the arguments for divine incorporeality have been built on the supposition that a material God would either limit Godself or entirely eclipse the creation. As for the first, it has been argued that the materiality of God is incompatible with God's omnipotence (including God's power to know of the world and, thus, God's omniscience). As for eclipsing creation, it has been argued that if God is material, there can be nothing created that is not God. Assume that it is an essential feature of a material being to be dense and impenetrable. If God is a material being and omnipresent (there is no place where God is absent), then it seems to follow that there is no material being other than God. Such a conclusion runs up against a fundamental monotheistic claim that not everything that exists is God. For many traditional theists, belief in divine omnipresence and a distinction between the creator and creation has seemed to fare better on the supposition that God is incorporeal.

Some influential arguments for divine incorporeality have been built on dualist theories of human nature combined with an appeal to revelation. The belief that we are singled out of the created order as made in the image of God (Genesis 1) prompted Jews and Christians to use what they believed distinguished us from other created beings in developing their understanding of God. On the grounds that this distinction lay in our possessing intellect and reason (in having a human soul or mind) which are immaterial, philosophers and theologians argued that this immaterial nature was a reflection of God's immateriality. Augustine counseled believers as follows: "Descend into thyself; go to thy secret place, thy mind ... to give thee some similitude to thy God ... because surely not in the body, but in that same mind, was man made after the image of God" (*Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel of John* XXIII.10). This reverses the position of the Stoic Chrysippus who partly based his belief in the materiality of God on the materiality of human persons.

Other arguments for divine incorporeality include the appeal to religious experience, according to which God is said to be beyond all created, material form. Idealist arguments are also worthy of note. If God exists and a form of idealism is true according to which there are no corporeal objects, then God is incorporeal.

## Arguments Against Divine Incorporeality

A major objection to theism from the mid-twentieth century onward among English-speaking philosophers of religion has been that it makes no sense to posit an incorporeal God. This position is advanced by those who contend that the concept of a person is the concept of a physical being. To attribute intelligence and personal agency to a thing which has no physical body is a category mistake. Analytical forms of behaviorism support such a stance. The positivist movement with its verification criterion of meaning also underwrites a critique of theism on conceptual grounds at precisely this point with the charge that claims about the activities of immaterial spirits are immune to empirical confirmation or disconfirmation and hence empty of content.

These objections have been addressed in different ways. Verificationism has met with many objections, as outlined in Chapter 54, *The Verificationist Challenge*, and its advocates today, such as Michael Martin, rarely advance it as possessing more than *prima facie* force. The reply to materialist theories that entail the impossibility of there being an incorporeal God have been addressed by some theists who argue that materialism is, at best, only contingently true. If it is true that human persons and all their activities are physical, this is a contingent state of affairs and not one that has a bearing on the coherence of the claim that there is a non-physical person or person-like reality. William Alston and Peter van Inwagen take this stance along with a range of philosophers who are often called *Christian materialists*, such as Trenton Merricks (for references see Taliaferro and Goetz 2008). Other philosophers (Richard Swinburne, Alvin Plantinga, William Hasker, and John Foster; see references in Taliaferro 1994) adopt a more aggressive tactic of arguing that materialism is not true even of human beings. Although materialism continues to be a powerful, prevalent philosophy of mind, it has met with important challenges (Unger 2005; Goetz and Taliaferro 2008) and this indirectly bolsters an incorporeal view of God. (Some of the issues at stake are addressed in Chapter 65, *Theism and the Scientific Understanding of the Mind*; and Chapter 36, *Divine Action*.)

Is a corporealist view of God an entirely rogue thesis, unheard of within the great monotheistic religious traditions? The sacred scriptures of these traditions, the Hebrew Bible and Christian New Testament and the Qur'an, each contain vivid corporeal imagery for God. There are many highly anthropomorphic references to God; God is said to have a head, eyes, fingers, arms, and so on. To be sure, theologians and philosophers in these traditions have gone to great lengths in arguing that such language is to be read as highly metaphorical references to an incorporeal reality. But this appears to constitute some evidence that arguments of this type were needed and therefore that the belief in God's corporeality has not been altogether absent. Famously, Thomas Hobbes contended that the God of Christianity should be understood as a corporeal being, albeit one that is pure, simple, and invisible. More recently, Grace Jantzen has developed a theology in which the material world is God's body. This is a thesis advanced by some contemporary defenders of process theology (see Chapter 17, *Process Theology*).

Those defending corporealism have sought to reply to the arguments cited in the first section by overturning at least one of the pair of attributes on the list. In this endeavor they are assisted by some incorporealists. Each of the following has been held by theists today who believe God is incorporeal: God does not necessarily exist, God is not eternal, God changes, God is not simple, God is a being rather than not Being. In these respects, then, incorporealists have removed some of the barriers to conceiving of God as a material reality. Views of the physical world that may assist corporealism have likewise been advanced of late. Thus, some hold that the material world is limitless, that it has always existed, and even that it necessarily exists.

As for the intelligibility of the God-world relation, some corporealists claim that God either is or contains the cosmos and that this does not compromise the distinctive identity of the different things making up the cosmos. Defenders of this position, such as Jantzen, seek to preserve the distinction between God and creation at the level of free agency (God does not directly control God's creatures; there are free, independent sources of action: see Chapter 46, Arguments from Consciousness and Free Will). They also seek to secure a more general independence of the world from God. Not all that occurs is the outcome of God's omnidetermining causation. By allowing for this relative independence, corporealists hope to avoid the thesis that the omnipresence of God precludes the existence of other, non-divine creatures. For Jantzen, God's omnipresence in the cosmos may be interpreted as a function of God's knowledge (God knows all that occurs at every point in creation), God's power (God can act upon any part of the cosmos), and God's constitution (God is the whole cosmos; no part of the cosmos would exist if God did not). God's identity as the world does not amount either to the world or to God being a dense, impenetrable object filling all things. Rather, God's omnipresence amounts to God's being metaphysically constituted by the cosmos and the cosmos being open to God's omniscient, omnipotent, conscious care. For Jantzen, God is in some sense more than the material world taken as a collection of objects and yet not an independently existing, immaterial subject or being.

Do corporealists make God dependent on the physical cosmos in a fashion that undermines the divine attributes of omnipotence and omniscience? The fact (if it is one) that God's corporeal nature would generate some restrictions for God may be no worse than if God is assumed to be incorporeal. Thus, if God is a corporeal being, God cannot survive the destruction of all corporeal beings. But if God is an incorporeal being, God cannot survive the destruction of all incorporeal beings. It may also be argued that in attributing omniscience to a corporeal God, one does not necessarily attribute to God certain limitations, such as the supposition that God must use eyes to see the cosmos, nerve endings to feel it, a brain to think about it, and so on. So long as incorporealists are prepared to acknowledge important disanalogies between divine and human embodiment, some of the embarrassments of anthropomorphism seem avoidable.

There remain some difficulties with the corporealist position. First and foremost, there is the problem of being able to surmount the cogency of all the arguments from divine attributes listed in the first section. While some incorporealists have joined corporealists in calling these into question, it has yet to be established that they have overturned these and thus defeated the cumulative case for divine incorporeality (see Wainwright 1974). It is also not clear whether corporealism has significant advantages over traditional incorporealism. Jantzen, for example, contends that her theory of God

has the advantage of eliminating the radical disparity between God and the cosmos that is at the heart of traditional incorporealism. It is not obvious, however, whether she has entirely eliminated a radical disparity between God and the cosmos in so far as she grants that God has states and activities that are not exclusively material. In so far as corporealists such as Jantzen and others preserve theistic notions of omnipotence and omniscience and do not wish to identify these as states of the world (i.e., God's intentions and knowledge are not the very same things as, say, certain explosions among the stars, earth tremors, and the like; one cannot scientifically observe God's intentions, knowledge, and so on), corporealists seem to be left with the idea that there is something radically different about God transcending the physical cosmos when it is conceived of as only a huge, perhaps limitless material expanse. Their distinction between the material world taken as merely material on the one hand, and taken as God's constitution and the bearer of the divine attributes (omniscience, love, and so on) on the other, marks a profound difference that does not give it a clear-cut advantage over traditional incorporealism. Corporealists thereby still retain a fundamental, deep division between the material and the immaterial.

Corporealists have, however, brought to light some of the difficulties of maintaining traditional incorporealism and the Christian understanding of the Incarnation. Thus, if one adopts incorporealism on the basis of the incompatible attributions cited in the previous section, it becomes difficult to see one's way to arguing that God can have become embodied as a human being. Can God be eternal as well as incarnate as a temporal being? Can God be changeless and yet incarnate as a being who was subjected to enormous change? Similar, tough questions await the traditionalist in working out conceptions of God's necessity, perfect goodness, simplicity, being, and omnipotence. (Some of the ways to address these problems are covered in chapters 25, 27, 31, and 33.) I note here that philosophical efforts to articulate an understanding of the Incarnation along traditional lines have led some theists either to modify their view of divine attributes (understanding God as being subject to time and change, for example) or to modify their view of the material world. Reflection on the latter, though, has tended to bolster a non-physicalist (typically dualist) theory of human persons rather than advance the cause of materialism. Many of the philosophical theists who articulate accounts of the Incarnation that secure God's pre-existence as the Son of God as well as God's solidarity with all humans in the Incarnation hold that both human persons and the divine person in the Trinity are non-physical (see Swinburne 1994).

## The Immanence of God

There may be a way for incorporealists to accommodate some of the motivation behind corporealism. Notwithstanding the resultant radical difference that corporealists retain between the material world and God's states, they set out to develop a profoundly immanent picture of the God-world relation. In their view, one may readily do justice to recognizing that in God we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). Can traditional incorporealists provide as rich an immanent picture of God's relation to creation?

If one embraces a traditional incorporealist understanding of God along with a passibilist treatment of God's perfect goodness, there may be a way to understand the creation, not as literally God's body or material composition, but as the affective equivalent of this. According to passibilism, God is affected by the world's states such that God takes pleasure in the goods of the world and sorrows over its ills. This responsiveness or, as Richard Creel puts it, this being "touched" by the world's states, may be understood as a manifestation of God's perfection (see Chapter 38, Immutability and Impassibility). Being affected by the states of one's own body appears to be one of the defining conditions for one's having a body (or being embodied) and this relation may provide one way of articulating in analogical terms God's proximate, caring presence to the world. New work on divine omniscience has included speculation that God has extensive experiential states may enhance the God-creation, person-body analogy (Zagzebski 2008).

Augustine complained that the identification of God and the world was monstrous. "When anyone tramples on anything, he tramples on God; when he kills any living thing, he kills God! I refuse to set forth all the conclusions which thinking men can draw, but which they cannot express without shame" (1958, vol. 4, p. 2). Some theists today do not seem to think it a shame to contend that God sorrows when creatures are unjustly killed and trampled and that this reflects a profound affective bond between God and the world that approaches (but is not the same as) thinking of the world as God's body. From the standpoint of traditional theism, the analogy between God and the world and a person and her body needs to be very carefully formulated so as not to supplant the freedom and autonomy of created individuals. The resultant passibilist identification of God with the world sketched here is not metaphysical, but ethical and psychological, and it may thereby prove to be less of a threat to individual freedom than extant versions of corporealism.

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## Beauty

PATRICK SHERRY

Beauty is probably today the most neglected of the divine attributes. Yet many of the early Christian Fathers and the medievals regarded it as central in their discussions of the divine nature, and they have been followed by a few significant later writers, including Jonathan Edwards and Simone Weil. In this chapter I discuss briefly the historical background and the reasons given traditionally for ascribing beauty to God, raise some issues and difficulties, and end by outlining a few positive suggestions.

### Sources and Arguments

The ascription of beauty to God in Western religious traditions can be traced back historically to two main sources, Plato and the Bible. The most important Platonic text is the so-called “ladder of beauty” in the *Symposium*, where Socrates reports the advice of the priestess Diotima that lovers of beauty should ascend from beautiful bodies to beautiful souls, laws, institutions, and fields of knowledge, until they come to Beauty itself (*Symposium* 210–11; it should be noted that the Greek *kalos*, like *beau* in French, has wider connotations than the English “beautiful”). It became common practice among early Christian writers, e.g., St Augustine, to identify Beauty itself with God, just as they identified Plato’s Form of the Good with God, often using his analogy (in *Republic* VI.509) between this Form and the sun.

The most influential of these early treatments occurs in *The Divine Names*, a treatise written around 500 CE by a Syrian monk known nowadays as Pseudo-Dionysius. In it, he says that the Good (which is one of his names for God) is called beauty because it imparts beauty to all things according to their natures. Furthermore, it is “the all-beautiful and the beautiful beyond all. It is forever so, unvaryingly, unchangeably so. ...” It is not beautiful in only one part or aspect, for “in itself it is the uniquely and eternally beautiful ... the superabundant source in itself of the beauty of every beautiful thing” (Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, IV.7).

St Thomas Aquinas’ fullest treatment of divine beauty comes in his commentary on *The Divine Names*, especially chapter 4, *lectio* 5. Like Pseudo-Dionysius he describes God as not only beautiful, but as beauty itself, the source of beauty in all things. He does not, however, make there or in any of his other works the claim which was made by

some other medieval thinkers, that beauty is one of the transcendentals, i.e., those concepts which apply to all being as such. Some of his later followers argued both that it is so and that this claim is implicit in what Aquinas says.

Most of the texts in the Hebrew Bible which ascribe beauty to God are to be found in the Psalms, e.g., Psalm 27:4, 71:8, 90:17, 145:5 – though again we must be careful about using the term “beauty” here, for the relevant terms can also be translated as “sweetness,” “splendor,” and “majesty.” Sometimes beauty is ascribed to places associated with God: thus in Psalm 50:2 we read, “Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines out.” The word *yophee* used here appears to be the nearest term in Hebrew to “beauty” in the aesthetic sense. But the most important Biblical concept in this connection is probably that of “glory” (Hebrew *kabod*). The earliest texts using it with reference to God associate it with visible phenomena like a cloud, fire, and the manifestations on Mount Sinai (Numbers 14:2); later it is used more generally of God’s power and splendor, especially in the Psalms (e.g., 96:3).

This usage forms the background to the ascription of divine glory to Christ in the New Testament, especially in the Epistles, e.g., in 2 Corinthians 4:6, where St Paul describes the glory of God as shining forth on the face of Christ. This, in turn, led to a long tradition of Christian theology which associates beauty particularly with the second person of the Trinity. St Augustine, for example, ascribes beauty to the Son, as being the exact image of the Father and also the “perfect Word and, so to speak, art of the almighty and wise God” (*On the Trinity*, VI.10.11). Similarly, when Aquinas gives his best-known analysis of beauty, in terms of integrity or completeness, right proportion or harmony, and radiance, he immediately goes on to say that these three characteristics make it particularly appropriate to associate beauty with the Son (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a.39.8).

It should be said that such theologians did not wish to ascribe beauty *only* to the Son, for there is also a long tradition which associates beauty with the Holy Spirit. As time went on, specifically Trinitarian theologies of beauty were worked out, e.g., in terms of the glory of the Father being manifested in that of the Son, which in turn is illuminated and shed forth in the world by the Holy Spirit. Perhaps the fullest such theology is to be found in Hans Urs von Balthasar’s *The Glory of the Lord*.

It should also be pointed out that theologies of beauty are by no means restricted to Christianity. Later Jewish mystical traditions developed the Hebrew Bible’s teaching on the radiant glory of God and its manifestation in creation. Hinduism celebrates the interplay between the beauty of the world and the presence of the beauty of the Lord Krishna.

In traditional theistic accounts three kinds of reason are offered for ascribing beauty to God: the arguments of natural theology, appeals to experience, and the claims of revelation. I will say a little about each.

### *Natural theology*

Toward the beginning of his *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas outlines a two-pronged argument for ascribing perfections to God: God must have all perfections because of God’s very nature as self-subsistent being; and God must have them because God is the cause of perfections in creatures, and any cause must always have the perfections of its effects

(1a.4.2). He applies this argument specifically to beauty in his commentary on *The Divine Names*. There he says that God is most beautiful and super-beautiful, both because of God's exceeding greatness (like the sun in relation to hot things) and because of God's causality, as source of all beauty. Because God has beauty, God wishes to multiply it by communicating God's likeness; hence God is the exemplary cause of all beauty in things (IV.5). Similarly, in the *Summa* Aquinas argues that God contains all perfections in God's essence, and in his *Commentary* he says that beautiful and beauty are not to be separated in God, because the First Cause, on account of God's simplicity and perfection, comprehends all in one.

### *Appeals to experience*

Such arguments from natural theology as those just summarized, even if valid, leave the nature of divine beauty unclear. At best, they tell us *that* God is beautiful or beauty. But many traditional treatments of the question also appeal to experience, both of God and of great worldly beauty, which is taken to be a manifestation of divine glory. An example of the first kind of experience is given in St Gregory of Nyssa's treatise *On Virginity*, in which he describes King David as having been lifted out of himself by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that he saw in a blessed state of ecstasy the boundless and incomprehensible beauty, a beauty which is invisible and formless (ch. 10). A few pages later Gregory, following Plato, exhorts his readers to mount a ladder from earthly beauty to the vision of beauty itself, with the aid of the Holy Spirit (ch. 11).

Other similar accounts of such visions of beauty, often regarded as anticipations of the beatific vision, are to be found in mystical literature. But more commonly the divine beauty is said to be discerned in some powerful experience of natural or artistic beauty, which is regarded as reflecting the nature of its creator. Thus the psalmist exclaimed, "The heavens declare the glory of the Lord" (Psalm 19:1). Similarly, later poets like Gerard Manley Hopkins expressed their wonder and joy at God's glory manifested in nature.

### *Revelation claims*

Experiences like those described above may be regarded as revelations of God. But the term "revelation" usually has a more restricted sense in Christian theology: many theologians would prefer to confine revelations of divine beauty to the epiphanies of the divine glory in the Old Testament, culminating in the manifestation of this glory in the Incarnation, or at least to regard these as the normative examples. For Balthasar, for instance, Christ is the paradigm of all beauty, and thereby the justification for ascribing beauty to God.

## Problems and Issues

The three approaches which I have just summarized are analogous to ones found in other areas of theology and philosophy of religion, and they encounter some familiar objections. Aquinas' two-pronged argument raises the questions of what a

self-subsistent being is, and whether causes must always have the qualities of their effects and, if so, why. The appeals to experience raise questions about the veracity of mystical experiences, and about whether the psalmist, Hopkins, and others were not just interpreting familiar experiences of natural beauty in terms of their prior religious beliefs (see Chapter 48, Religious Experience). And the more directly theological approach raises a vast range of questions about the nature of revelation (see Chapter 82, Philosophical Reflection on Revelation and Scripture) and how it is recognized, and about the theology of the Incarnation.

But besides these general difficulties and objections, the appeal to divine beauty raises problems of its own. It is often said today that beauty is simply a matter of what pleases people, that what pleases them differs from person to person and from culture to culture, and that in any case the concept is an outmoded one. Certainly the concept seems to create many problems: What is beauty? Why do we find it so difficult to define and judge? Why do people disagree so much about it? Is it in things themselves or rather, as people say, “in the eye of the beholder”? Modern philosophical aesthetics regards the nature and grounds of aesthetic judgment as only one topic among many, and even here it allots to the consideration of beauty only a minor role, perhaps following the example of much art and literature, which rejects or disregards the traditional view that its role is to celebrate the beauty of creation.

Moreover, the idea of divine beauty seems to raise further difficulties. We commonly think of beauty in terms of colors, shapes, sounds, and so forth – things experienced through the senses. So how can God, who has no body or matter, be described as beautiful? Of course, similar problems arise with other divine attributes, like wisdom, power, and love. But theistic believers get some handle on these other attributes by trying to discern the relevant divine actions, e.g., God’s wise governance of the world, God’s power manifested in natural phenomena or in holiness, and God’s love shown in providence and especially, Christians say, in the life and work of Christ. In the case of beauty, however, it is difficult to find any corresponding actions other than God’s creation of beauty in the world. Those who try to fill in the picture here tend to say that God’s beauty is inexpressible, or else to produce something rather formal, for instance by applying Aquinas’ threefold analysis of beauty to the divine Being.

At the root of many of these problems, I think, is the fact that we lack a proper vocabulary to support our ascriptions of beauty to God. We usually employ the term “beautiful” in two ways: as an overall verdict on a work of art or a natural phenomenon, or to qualify another term, as in “beautifully structured.” Either way, the term is supported by a vast range of concepts: by other aesthetic ones like “elegant” and “graceful,” or by particular words describing the qualities of colors, sounds, and so on. Much of this vocabulary, however, is inappropriate for describing God – what would a pretty, handsome, or elegant God be like? In the case of divine beauty the neighboring or supporting concepts are drawn from elsewhere: from the language of power (the biblical term “glory” suggests power as well as beauty, and goes along with terms like “majesty,” “splendor,” and “strength” – see Chapter 27, Omnipotence), from that of ethics (those who speak of Christ’s beauty commonly stress his moral and spiritual qualities), or from the more general divine attributes of holiness, perfection, goodness, and excellence (see Chapter 30, Goodness). God’s beauty is also often related to light, in the sense of intellectual or spiritual illumination, and hence to wisdom, knowledge, and truth (see

Chapter 28, Omniscience). It seems, therefore, that the concept of divine beauty is obscure both in itself and in its relation to more familiar kinds of beauty.

### Some Suggestions

The difficulties which I have summarized are formidable, but they may not be insuperable. Although contemporary aesthetics allots a lesser role to beauty than that of earlier centuries, the concept is still the subject of much philosophical reflection and writing. Indeed, the term has made something of a comeback since around 1970 among analytic philosophers, many of whom defend an objectivist account (e.g., Zemach 1997). After all, the term is in common use, both among ordinary people and among artists and writers. Moreover, it is not true that beauty is ascribed *only* to colors, lines, sounds, and so forth: people commonly speak of the beauty of scientific theories and of the elegance of mathematical proofs. Also, although the beauty of good deeds and of virtues is more rarely hymned today than in the ancient world or even as late as the eighteenth century, we still speak of beautiful personalities, sweetness of character, and moral deformity. If, therefore, we still recognize moral and intellectual beauty, there may be no good reason for excluding beauty *a priori* from God.

Still, it is difficult to see how one might go on from this point, given the paucity of recent reflection on divine beauty in both philosophical and theological literature (I detect that the topic is making a return in some popular religious writing, e.g., in a poetic and allusive way; O'Donohue, 2003. Usually however such works dwell more on the immanence of God's beauty in the world than on what it is in itself). One might use recent work defending the claims of religious experience against skeptical objections, e.g., by arguing that its being different from ordinary sense experience is not sufficient warrant for rejecting it and that it should be regarded as "innocent until proved guilty," and thereby defend the propriety of appealing to visions of divine beauty. But this strategy, even if successful, still leaves the nature of divine beauty unclear to those who have not had such visions.

There are, in principle, two other possible starting points for a philosopher here: the divine nature itself and the beauty of creation. As regards the first, it may be that God's beauty could be construed in terms of the relationship between God's attributes: Edgar de Bruyne, in discussing some remarks of Duns Scotus, mentioned the idea that God's beauty is the harmony in the "ocean" of divine perfections, which are formally distinct but are united in the simplicity of the divine essence (Bruyne 1946, pp. 356, 359). He did not, however, develop this idea – to do so would require a full discussion of the various divine attributes and their relation to the simplicity of the divine nature.

A discussion of the topic which started from our apprehension of beauty in nature and in art would naturally relate this to a doctrine of creation (see Chapter 37, Creation and Conservation). Again, one should first scrutinize some of the common objections put forward. It is not true, for example, that all modern thinkers have found the ascription of beauty to God more problematical than, say, power or wisdom. Simone Weil, as we shall see below, found the luminosity of beauty and its ability to excite wonder and spiritual longing a particularly apt starting point for considering God's presence in the world. And is it true that the psalmist, Hopkins, and others were offering a religious

“interpretation” of the world when they saw its beauty as a manifestation of divine glory? If they were, it was not quite in the way that people do so when they see some fortunate occurrence as the working of providence (see Chapter 39, Providence), for there is an ambiguity in the latter case which is not present in the case of beauty. When Hopkins exclaimed, in his poem “God’s Grandeur,”

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil

he was not, I think, offering us an *interpretation*; for God’s glory seemed to him to shine out through nature, just as it did for the psalmist in the heavens.

We find a philosophical presentation of this line of thought, and a very bold and simple one, in the work of Simone Weil. She describes the beauty of the world which attracts us as the appearance of divine beauty, a “snare” through which God captures the soul in spite of itself. Indeed, she continues, it is a kind of incarnation:

In everything which gives us the pure authentic feeling of beauty there really is the presence of God. There is as it were an incarnation of God in the world and it is indicated by beauty.

The beautiful is the experimental proof that the incarnation is possible. (Weil 1952, p. 137)

She goes further by describing beauty as a very attribute of God, and as the attribute in which we see God: writing of the “ladder of beauty” in the *Symposium*, she says that we are not dealing here with a general idea of beauty, but with “the beauty of God; it is the attribute of God under which we see him” (Weil 1968, p. 129). She agrees with Plato that beauty is the only one of the “lovable realities” (*Phaedrus* 250d) that is seen, unlike attributes such as wisdom: for her, the beauty of the world *is* God’s own beauty, made manifest to the senses.

It is this very bold account of beauty that enables Weil, in an argument reminiscent of recent theological theses about “implicit” or “anonymous” Christianity, to claim that the love of beauty may be what she calls a “form of the implicit love of God.” In her essay on this topic she says, “The Beauty of the world is Christ’s tender smile for us coming through matter. He is really present in the universal beauty” (Weil 1959, p. 120). This seemingly irenic argument, however, has some harsh implications: for Weil, those who ignore or deface beauty are committing a religious fault.

Although Weil’s treatment is much influenced by Plato, especially the *Symposium*, she does not share his anxiety to mount from earthly beauty to Beauty itself as quickly as possible. Rather, she seems more interested in the traffic *down* the ladder, i.e., in the ways in which beauty is, as she says, “incarnated” in this world. This is partly, I think, because of her admiration for ancient Stoicism with its love for the world, our universal homeland (see Weil 1959, pp. 131–2); but more so because of her strong doctrine of creation. She takes the myth of creation in the *Timaeus*, according to which the Demiurge made the world through what Plato calls the Soul of the World and the Model of Creation, and she identifies this trio with the Christian Trinity (Weil 1968, pp. 132–3). For her, again, God’s beauty is, through Christ and the Holy Spirit, immanent in the world, because of the creation.



Weil's approach is strikingly bold. If she is right, she has in the simplest possible way solved our problem of explaining what the divine beauty is, and how it is related to worldly beauty. She has also explained why aesthetic experience is for many people also a religious experience; and by treating the beauty we perceive as a mode of God's presence she has avoided the seeming emptiness of both inferences to divine beauty and secondhand reports of mystical experiences.

Her position is, however, elusive at times, largely because of the aphoristic style in which she writes. She treats beauty in an abstract way, giving few examples either from nature or from art, and is not concerned with the relationship between it and other aesthetic concepts. Insofar as she relates beauty to other concepts, it is to ones like truth, eternity, and goodness. But her approach is, I think, right in that she sees that any account of divine beauty must relate it to the beauty we perceive, and that a doctrine of creation plays a central role here. Any further philosophical treatment of the question will need to deal with the relationship between God's beauty and the other divine attributes, as well as to elucidate further the relationship between God and the world.

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## Divine Action

THOMAS F. TRACY

It has often been noted that the God of the theistic traditions in the West is preeminently a God who acts. The sacred texts and liturgical practices of these religions vividly depict God as an agent whose purposes are enacted in a drama of universal scope, stretching from the creation to the consummation of all things. There are, to be sure, other ways of representing God in these texts and traditions: for example, as impersonal or supra-personal ground of being. The theme of divine action, however, is woven so deeply into the fabric of these faiths that any adequate account of theistic beliefs must take it into account.

### Varieties of Divine Action

Divine action in these traditions takes a number of different forms. First and foremost, there is God's action of creating and sustaining the world, i.e., the totality of non-divine things (see Chapter 37, Creation and Conservation). This creative action has been understood in more than one way, but we can identify three elements in the classical theistic view. First, most theists have held that there would be no world, not even an unformed and chaotic one, apart from God's creative action; God creates *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). Second, this act of creation is not a single event completed at some point in the past. God does not impart to creatures a power of existence which they then possess on their own. Rather, creatures depend absolutely upon God for their existence at every moment, so that if God should cease to sustain (or "conserve") them, they would cease to be. Understood in this way, creation is the ongoing, continuous action by which God brings about the very existence of the world. Third, theists have usually said that this divine creative activity is not a necessity of the divine nature, but rather expresses God's free decision. God could exist without a world of finite things but chooses, for the good of creatures, to bring the world into being. This stands in contrast, for example, to a Neoplatonic conception of creation as a necessary emanation of the self-sufficient but inherently diffusive divine perfection. The finite world, on a Neoplatonic account, is generated by an outflowing of the divine being that does not involve will or purpose. Over against this, most theists have held that God, in an act of free generosity, intentionally and voluntarily causes the world to be.

Contemporary process, or neoclassical, theologians have offered a significantly different account of God's creative action (see Chapter 17, Process Theology). The Whiteheadian metaphysical scheme requires that every existing individual, including God, must be a creative integration of relations to other individuals. In this view, God and the world are mutually dependent and co-eternal, and God's distinctiveness as a creative agent lies in the universal scope of God's relatedness to others and the unique role God plays in contributing an "initial aim" to the development of each individual. The existence of the world cannot be attributed to God's action, on this account, but God acts pervasively in the world's creative becoming.

The theistic traditions characteristically have affirmed that in addition to creating and sustaining all finite things, God governs the processes of nature and the dramas of human history, acting to assure that the divine purposes for creation will be fulfilled. Having called the world into being, God does not then become a detached observer, but remains intimately involved in history. Indeed, it is a corollary of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* that nothing in the course of events occurs without God's will or permission.

A distinction is sometimes made between general and particular providence. God's general providence establishes the fundamental principles and basic dynamics by which the history of the created world unfolds, e.g., God determines the elemental constituents of the universe, the laws characterizing their interactions, their potential to enter into complex structures that make possible higher level entities and properties. God so arranges the world that various natural goods can be realized (for example, that human beings thrive on the earth), and these goods may be understood to be brought about by God's provident design.

Beyond establishing and superintending the overall course of history, God acts at particular times and places to achieve specific ends; this is particular providence. The narratives of the Hebrew Bible, for example, portray God as engaging human beings through a series of revelatory and redemptive actions in history. God calls Abraham and his descendants into a covenant relation; God rescues the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt and gives the law at Sinai; God raises up kings and prophets; God acts in myriad ways to judge, sustain, and redeem this people through all the vicissitudes of their history. Christianity and Islam incorporate much of this history of divine action, and because each tradition develops these stories in a different way, they generate distinctive understandings of God's purposes and identity. The canonical narratives of each theistic tradition shape its views about what God is doing in history, and these views generate a range of specific claims about divine action. Theists typically affirm that the God depicted in their sacred texts acts in the familiar world around them, in their communities of worship, and in their own lives. The life of faith can be understood as an ongoing relationship of interaction with God in which, for example, God calls, inspires, strengthens, chastens, forgives, saves, sanctifies, and may respond to human intercessions and petitions.

The distinction between general and particular divine providence has often been collapsed in modern theology (e.g., by Schleiermacher 1963 [1830]), so that particular providence is understood exclusively as the outworking of general providence in specific cases. For example, an event in the natural world (say, a strong east wind as the Israelites fleeing Pharaoh approach the Sea of Reeds) may be the result of the ordinary

operations of natural law and yet also be understood to express God's particular purposes for the community whose destiny is especially affected by this event. Indeed, the entire history of the world, to the extent that it flows from causal laws and initial conditions established by God, can be regarded as an extended act of God mediated through natural processes. On this account, events can be identified as "special divine acts" insofar as they play a distinctive role in revealing and/or advancing divine purposes that were initially written into the course of history. Such a view denies, however, that God acts within historical processes to turn events in a new direction, bringing about developments that would not have occurred but for this particular divine initiative. The elimination of special divine action, in this strong sense, has theologically significant consequences (for example, in Christology and soteriology), and so is a matter of debate in contemporary theology.

These rich patterns of talk about divine action raise a number of compelling philosophical and theological questions. There are, in the first place, puzzles about the coherence of the concept of God as an agent of intentional actions. Are some of the properties that theists have traditionally ascribed to God incompatible with the claim that God acts? Second, questions arise about the relation of God's actions to the operations of created causes in the natural order. This question has especially dominated modern considerations of particular divine action, given the rise of the natural sciences and the "disenchantment" of nature as a scene of supernatural activity.

## God as Agent of Intentional Actions

A number of the properties that many (but not all) theists have ascribed to God may be thought to be inconsistent with the claim that God is an agent of intentional actions. Consider, for example, the claims that (a) God is incorporeal and is not located in space, and (b) God is not in time but exists in timeless eternity. Can a being that is in neither space nor time coherently be said to act?

Turning first to the claim of divine incorporeality, it is of course true that the agents with whom we are most familiar are bodily agents whose powers of action are rooted in the capacities of the organism that bears their life and who affect the world around them through physical interactions. This alone, however, does not warrant the conclusion that embodiment is a necessary condition of agency generally, rather than a contingent matter of fact about agents of our type. Clearly, the concepts "agent" and "action" are logically linked; an intentional agent must be able to bring about at least some states of affairs "on purpose" (that is, roughly, because the agent believes that doing so will satisfy the action description which expresses the agent's aim). But is talk of intentional action inseparably linked to talk of bodily behavior? Even in our own case we are able to act without undertaking any intentional bodily motion, e.g., in various mental acts. I intend a movement of my body in intentionally raising my arm, but I do not intend any bodily event in working out a bit of mental arithmetic, even though this no doubt involves neurological processes in the brain. Our mental activities may be dependent upon brain events, but the description of such an activity (say, counting backward from one hundred) does not, by itself, entail any statements about brain events. Although there are many action descriptions (such as "waving to a friend")

that do refer to some form of bodily behavior, this is not a feature of every action type. Even actions that intend changes in the physical world need not specify that these changes are brought about by the motions of an agent's body. We may not be able to explain *how* an incorporeal agent brings about physical effects, but talk of such agency poses no readily discernible problem of internal consistency (see Chapter 34, Incorporeality; and Chapter 29, Omnipresence).

What of the claim that God exists in timeless eternity? Can a timeless being be said to act and, in particular, to act in history? Actions would appear to take time and to take place in time; that is, they are temporally extended and temporally located. If God brings about an event that occurs within a temporal series and occupies a portion of that series (one of God's "mighty acts in history," for example), then must the divine agent also be located in time? Note, in particular, that if some of God's actions are responses to human actions, then it would seem that (1) they must be undertaken by God after the human actions to which they respond, and (2) God undergoes a temporal transition from not-acting to acting.

Considerations like these have led some theists to grant that God exists in time. To say that God is eternal is then to say that God exists at all times without beginning or end. Against this, defenders of divine atemporality have insisted that God's creative act must include the creation of time itself, whether time is understood as a structure in which entities and events are located or as a function of the relations between finite things. God can create time, however, only if God exists outside time. There are, of course, profound limits on our ability to imagine and express the notion of timeless existence, and most theorists who defend the coherence of this concept appeal to analogies drawn from spatial relations in which a subject observes an extended series at a single moment (for example, observation from high ground of a line of travelers on a road; simultaneous viewing of a length of unwound motion picture film). Analogies of this sort suggest that we think of the whole temporal order as immediately present to God, so that God is simultaneous with every event in time even though these events are not all simultaneous with each other. God will have access, then, to the entire course of history all at once, and can act at every point in the time series simultaneously from the eternal now. Considered from the divine agent's side, none of God's acts is before or after any of the others; all are initiated at once outside time. Each of their effects, however, occurs at its appropriate moment in history.

In this account of timeless divine action, a distinction is at work between God's agency (God's decree) and the effect brought about by that agency (the event decreed). The events that God decrees unfold in time as a history of divine action. But all of God's acts, from creation to redemption and consummation, are decreed in the timeless unity of the eternal now. These divine acts stand in relations of logical and explanatory priority both with one another and with events in history. If, for example, God acts in response to a free human action, the human action is prior (in the order of explanation) to the divine response. But there will be no temporal succession in God's life; the whole of history and all of God's actions are contained within the unitary present of eternity. It hardly needs to be said that this concept of atemporal divine agency is a rich source of philosophical puzzles, and it is the subject of ongoing and vigorous debate (see Chapter 32, Eternity; and Chapter 56, Foreknowledge and Human Freedom).

## Divine Action and Created Causes

A second set of questions about divine action has to do with the relation of God's activity to the operations of created causes and to the order of nature. It is often said that God acts in and through the processes of nature and history. How might this be understood? What is the relation between traditional affirmations of particular divine action in the world, on the one hand, and scientific descriptions of the world as an intelligible law-governed structure, on the other?

In approaching these questions, it is useful to make a distinction between direct and indirect intentional actions. Agents often perform one action (e.g., heating water) by doing another (placing a kettle over a flame). An indirect action is brought about by means of action under another description, and any action of this sort must, on pain of infinite regress, originate in an action that the agent undertakes without having to perform any prior intentional action as the means to it.

Theists typically have held that God acts both directly and indirectly, choosing in creation to establish and then to act through an order of created causes. God's creative act of calling the world into being is direct; the divine agent decrees that the world shall be, and it is. So, too, the action of sustaining the world in existence is direct; if God were no longer to conserve the existence of finite things, they would instantaneously cease to be. Not all of God's actions need be direct, however. God may choose to bestow various causal powers upon created things, and to bring about effects by means of these secondary causes. Rather than directly producing changes in finite things (e.g., causing the water to boil spontaneously), God endows created things with causal efficacy of their own, instituting a natural order in which the water is heated by means of a flame. God directly and at every moment causes finite things to *be* (that is, to be *ex nihilo*, rather than merely to undergo change), and this creative act is unique to God. But God also empowers creatures to cause *changes* in other existing things, including the changes that we ordinarily call "coming into or passing out of existence," as in birth and death. These effects are brought about both by God and by the finite cause, though on different levels (for example, see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia.105.5). God is the primary cause, whose creative action establishes and sustains the network of secondary causes through which the history of the world unfolds. Creatures, in exercising the causal powers God has given them, are the instruments of God's indirect action.

It might be held that this account does not fully convey the depth of creatures' dependence upon God in their operation as secondary causes. According to medieval scholastic theologians, it is not enough that God creates and sustains finite entities and structures their causal powers. Beyond this, God must also act directly with creatures if they are to exercise those powers. This divine concurrence, or cooperation, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the finite cause to produce its effect. God acts as a general cause, empowering all creatures in their causal operations. Since the divine concurrence is universal and uniform, the difference in the effect from case to case reflects the specific nature of the creaturely cause. Without this direct divine cooperation, it was claimed, creatures will simply fail to produce effects at all. The idea of divine concurrence has received relatively little attention in modern discussions of divine action, in part because it is unclear what concurrence amounts to and why it is needed



over and above the affirmation that God creates and sustains a world in which creatures possess and exercise causal powers.

These basic affirmations about God's direct and indirect agency make possible an account of particular, or special, divine action in the world. Note, in the first place, that if the causal history of the world is strictly deterministic, then every event within it can be regarded as an indirect act of God mediated through the operation of secondary causes. God can realize particular divine purposes simply by designing the causal laws and initial conditions of the natural order so as to guarantee that the intended result will be achieved. If one holds that all of God's actions in the world take this form, then the result (as we noted above) is to absorb particular providence entirely into God's general providence in creation and conservation.

Traditionally, however, theists have affirmed that God also acts directly within the world to bring about events that were not built into history from the outset. In a deterministic universe, such actions must constitute miraculous departures from the ordinary course of nature (see Chapter 47, *Miracles*); this will be the case whether these divine interventions are overtly spectacular "mighty acts" or exquisitely subtle contributions to the mental or spiritual lives of human agents. For this reason, a succession of modern theologians has held that we can no longer affirm direct and particular divine action in history. They have been led to this view, at least in part, by their belief that universal causal determinism either has been established by the natural sciences or is presupposed by scientific methods of inquiry. There are good reasons, however, to deny both these claims; indeed, there currently are compelling scientific grounds (for example, in leading versions of what has come to be called the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics) for thinking that universal determinism is false. In any case, an avowal of determinism represents a step beyond physics into metaphysics, and it is neither required nor warranted by the natural sciences.

In a non-deterministic universe, the simple picture of God's indirect action through the causal structures of nature is complicated by the fact that at least some of these causal chains will be incomplete. Events will lack causally sufficient antecedent conditions in the natural order when there is an element of indeterministic chance in their history and/or when they result from human actions that are free in the strong (i.e., "libertarian") sense. God could choose to determine events of either sort; they would then be chance or (more controversially) free only in their relation to other finite events. When God does not do this, however, these underdetermined events may initiate causal chains in the world which cannot simply be attributed to God as (indirect) divine acts, though God directly gives them their being and assigns them this role in history.

Note that the integration of chance into the order of nature provides a structure within which God's particular providential actions need not involve any miraculous suspension of natural law. In selectively determining events that occur by chance on the finite level, God does not displace natural causes that would otherwise have determined that event, and God's activity could be entirely compatible with whatever the sciences may tell us about the distribution of such events in regular probabilistic patterns. In this way, the world God has made could display both a reliable causal structure and an inherent openness to novelty, allowing for a seamless integration of natural law and ongoing direct involvement by God in shaping the course of events.

Theists, then, may affirm both that God acts universally in the creation and conservation of all things and that God acts in particular events in history. The latter may be understood in several ways: (1) as indirect action through secondary causal chains; (2) as direct action that brings about events outside the regularities of nature; and (3) as direct action that determines natural indeterminacies within the lawful structures of nature. In any or all of these ways, God can affect the course of history and interact with human beings to achieve particular divine purposes. (See also Chapter 39, Providence.)

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## Creation and Conservation

HUGH J. MCCANN

Popular beliefs about creation typically accord God a more active role in the foundation of the universe than in its preservation. It is generally allowed that God may annihilate the world, but its continued existence is not viewed as owing directly to God's creative activity. The assumption is rather that once in place, the universe can continue to exist on its own, and that divine involvement is required only for special acts of providence and mercy. This is not, however, the view of traditional Western theology. There, the typical account has it that God is as much responsible for the continued existence of the world as for its inception, and that God's activity in both creating and sustaining the universe is essentially the same. Associated with this position is the idea that God's sovereignty over the world is complete: that God's is the "first cause" of all that is and occurs, and that God's providence guides directly every detail of the entire history of the universe. This sort of view has a number of controversial implications, not all of which can be discussed here. It is possible, however, to set forth the main considerations that motivate it and address some of the more obvious difficulties.

### Initial Reservations

It is well to begin by looking at the difficulties. Some objections to divine conservation are theologically motivated. The narrative of creation in the Hebrew Bible seems clearly to portray God as bringing forth new things; it does not postulate any activity of sustenance, but rather states that after the initial production of things "He rested" (Genesis 2:2). Likewise, God is not, at least usually, portrayed as actively involved in the daily maintenance of creation. That God observes all, and knows the fall of every sparrow, is certain; but God's active engagement is reserved for special occasions. The titanic events of the exodus and of the conquest of Canaan, the miraculous cures that occur throughout scripture, and the redemptive acts of the New Testament are all portrayed as divine *interventions* in the normal course of events. To think of God as equally involved in all that occurs in the world would seem, therefore, to blur the distinction between miracles and ordinary events. Furthermore, it places God uncomfortably close to the untoward occurrences of the world, particularly moral wrongdoing. If God's

creative activity is directly responsible for all that takes place, human freedom appears to be threatened, and with it the free will defense against the problem of evil.

Equally problematic considerations arise on the cosmological front. If the conservation of the world is of a piece with its creation, we may be headed for a “continuous creation” theory of the sort held by Jonathan Edwards, wherein the world is held to pass away and be recreated at each moment of its existence. There are considerable conceptual difficulties here, and in any case such a view seems empirically false. What is more, the conservation doctrine appears to conflict with conservation principles in science. If mass/energy is preserved in all physical processes and interactions, what need is there for God to preserve it? Finally, making God the first cause of all that occurs threatens the efficacy of secondary causes in nature. If God is the producer of everything, what is left for them to produce?

### Coming to Be and Being

One can begin to address these concerns by considering what the result of God’s creative activity must be. It is natural to think of coming to be as a process, in which the material of which a thing is made undergoes transformation until it becomes the thing produced. That is the way it is when things are produced in nature, and when we do things like build houses or sculpt statues. But creation cannot be understood in this way. It occurs *ex nihilo* (from nothing): it involves no pre-existing “matter,” no transformation of any underlying stuff of which the universe is made. Therefore, even if the world had a temporal beginning, what is brought about in creation is not any process wherein it came to be, and its appearance was not a change in which any thing changed. Quite the opposite: there is nothing short of the *being* of things that can constitute the product of creation. Even in the beginning, if there was one, there was nothing else for God to bring about.

Once this is realized, the problem with Edwards’ sort of theory emerges. The world is not in any process of continually passing away and being re-created: there can be no process of the world’s passing away, just as there can be none of its coming to be. Rather, any time at which the world does not fully exist must be a time at which it does not exist at all. So we can think of the world as being continually brought into existence, in the strict sense, only by postulating its repeated complete demise – a view which, amid other difficulties, seems quite false. “Continuous creation” should not, then, be interpreted to mean that the world is continually passing away and coming to be. Rather, it is simply a way of making the point that as creator, God is directly responsible for the entire existence of the universe. And on this score, the continuous creation view turns out to be very much on the right track.

Here, too, the fact that the coming to be of the universe is not a process is important. If it were a process, we would have reason for thinking that as creator, God is more directly involved in the first appearance of things than in their continuance. For the coming to be of the universe would then be a phenomenon different in kind from its being, and so might call for more direct or active engagement on God’s part. But that is precisely what is false. Even at a supposed first moment of the world’s existence, God is simply responsible for its being. There is no procedure to be gone through, no

transitional phases that need to elapse, only the existence of things which stands as the result of creation. But if this is so, then to make God responsible for the sustenance as well as the emergence of the world is not to impute to God a different activity from that in which God is supposed to have engaged “in the beginning.” On the contrary: God’s creating and conserving the world are, from the point of view of the act itself, indistinguishable, a seamless endeavor consistent with the divine simplicity (see Chapter 31, Simplicity), and responsible for every instant of the world’s existence. Indeed, it is hard to see how we could require less. If, from the perspective of creation, a first moment of the world’s history is the same as any other, how can God’s activity as creator not be as vital to getting the world beyond the present instant as to its being here at all?

### Self-Sustenance

Perhaps, however, there is some capacity of things to sustain themselves in existence, or an inertia-like tendency to remain in being once they appear. The endurance of the world is, after all, a common enough fact of experience, whereas we detect no independent activity of God to keep it there. Furthermore, there are scientific laws that call for the conservation of mass and energy, and surely in this regard science does not take itself to be dealing with supernatural phenomena. So we seem to have good reason for expecting the persistence of the world to have a natural explanation, not a divine one.

However, once we consider what the explanation might be, we are in trouble. Scientific laws do not explain things by being “out there” dictating that certain events must happen. They explain by describing processes and dispositions which belong to the nature of things, and which are ontologically prior to the laws that describe them. But when it comes to the sheer persistence of the world, this is an empty idea. There could not, first of all, be any active process by which things are somehow able to sustain their own existence, propelling themselves from the present into the future. Such a claim would be utterly without empirical backing. We know of no such process, nor is it possible even to imagine what it would be like. We can successfully envision processes that account for the descriptive features of the world – processes that underlie chemical reactions, for example, or which account for the occurrence of economic recessions. But what natural process could account simply for the continued existence of things? None, it would seem, for the sheer existence of things cannot be a manifestation of their behavior. Their behavior, and their interaction with other entities, can account for the ways in which the items that make up the world manifest themselves, but it cannot account for the sheer fact that they are there, or continue to be there.

There are, in addition, metaphysical difficulties attending the idea that there is a process of self-sustenance to be found in the world. Presumably, any entity manifesting such a process would do so in virtue of its internal organization. That is, there would have to be some structure of the entity – some machinery, as it were – through which the operation of self-sustenance is carried out. Otherwise, it would be hard to see how it could count as a process at all. But even if, *per impossibile*, we were able to imagine such structures, we would then have to ask how they are sustained in existence. If they are sustained by God, we will have gotten nowhere; if, on the other hand, a further substructure is needed for their sustenance, we are headed for an infinite regress.

Furthermore, it is difficult to see how any such process could succeed. In order to do so, the operation of the process at a time  $t$  would have to have as its effect the existence of the entity at some later time  $t^*$ . Otherwise, the endurance of whatever entity is at issue will go unaccounted for. But since time is a continuum, there is no temporal instant immediately adjacent to  $t$ . There must, therefore, be an interval between  $t$  and  $t^*$ . This in turn requires that our supposed process act at a temporal distance: that is, any instance of its operation must have direct effects at times distant from the operation. And this surely is impossible.

It does not appear, then, that the created world could have an active capacity to sustain itself. Would another conception have more success? Perhaps we should view the supposed ability of things to sustain themselves as a mere disposition rather than an active power – a simple capacity to continue in existence, rather like the tendency in classical physics for an object to continue at rest or in motion unless acted upon. But while this conception may look more promising, in the end it fares no better. In themselves, dispositions cannot explain anything. The solubility of salt no more explains its dissolving in water than the dormitive virtue of morphine explains its putting people to sleep. Rather, when dispositions are associated with good explanations it is because they are grounded in structural elements of the situations in which they are found, elements which *act* in appropriate circumstances to produce a characteristic result. Thus salt is water-soluble because it and water are so structured atomically that when they are combined there occurs a *process* in which the salt is dissolved. We cannot, however, understand the alleged disposition for self-sustenance in this way, for this would not be a purely dispositional account. Rather, it would reduce self-sustenance to the sort of active power considered above, and we have already seen that this approach must fail.

What would a purely dispositional account look like? We would have to postulate a strictly metaphysical disposition, one that has no supervenience base and is manifested in no process or activity, but which we nevertheless claim explains the endurance of the created world. In fact, however, there is no difference, scientific or philosophical, between this kind of disposition and no disposition at all. Remember that the endeavor here is to explain the continued existence of things. For that, the alleged disposition has to come to more than the fact that things do continue – a fact that would hold whether the explanation were divine or natural. And a purely metaphysical disposition comes to no more. Without a supervenience base, it can have no ontological foundation in things, and with no characteristic activity its sole manifestation must lie precisely in the world's continued existence. Clearly, there is no reason to suppose that such a disposition amounts to anything whatever that is real. Even if it did, we would have to ask what in turn, other than God's creative activity, enables it to persist. Still less is there reason to suppose that such a disposition could explain anything. In this respect the comparison with inertial movement turns out to be quite apt, since the latter was notoriously left unexplained in classical physics. And just as it is no explanation of inertial movement to say things tend to move that way, so it is no explanation of the continuance of the world to say it tends to continue. What is needed is an account of this phenomenon based on the intrinsic nature of things. A purely metaphysical disposition amounts to a refusal to provide that, and so leaves the "self-" in self-sustenance with no meaning. We can only conclude, therefore, that the continued existence of the



world can have no explanation based on features intrinsic to it. That the world persists must be explained in the same way as the fact that it exists at all: through the creative activity of God.

## Conservation Principles and Secondary Causes

What are we to say, then, about conservation principles in science? These appear to call for the preservation of mass/energy – to make it, in fact, a matter of natural law. Are they simply mistaken? Or are we brought to the unlikely conclusion that they turn out to concern a supernatural process of divine conservation? The answer is neither. Such principles would indeed be mistaken if taken to postulate a natural power of self-conservation in things, but that is a mistaken interpretation. The law of conservation for mass/energy does not, as usually formulated, call for the preservation of anything *tout court*. There are two qualifications. First, mass/energy is held to be preserved in closed systems, which are *defined* as systems in which mass/energy is neither gained nor lost. This alone shows that the principle at issue is not aimed at accounting for the persistence of things. If it were, this proviso would reduce it to the vacuous claim that the amount of mass/energy in the world remains the same unless it doesn't.

What then is the aim of the principle? The answer is to be seen in the second qualification usually found in formulations of the conservation principle, which is that the amount of mass/energy is preserved *in all physical interactions*. What this implies is that the conservation law is concerned not with the persistence of the world, but rather with the transformations it undergoes. And what it holds, in effect, is that there is no physical process for either the creation or the destruction of mass/energy. But that is precisely what was argued above. The very idea of such a process is impossible, for there is nothing it could consist in. Far from being in disagreement, therefore, the claim that divine conservation is responsible for the persistence of the world dovetails completely with the law of conservation for mass/energy.

There is equal reason for optimism on the subject of secondary causation. Strong doctrines of divine conservation are sometimes associated with a simplistic occasionalism, in which it is concluded that since God is the cause of all, the things God creates must have no real nature or powers. However, this too is mistaken. It is true that God is responsible for the existence of everything, and that this has to include the characteristics of things as well as the things themselves. Otherwise we are left with an untenable doctrine of bare particulars, in which God is responsible only for the existence of substances, any one of which might have any nature you please, or for that matter none at all. But to make God responsible for the existence of everything is hardly to say that there is no such thing as chemical bonding, or electromagnetic waves, or the forceful interactions of physics. Laws that describe the nature and behavior of created things have all the significance they ever did, even in a world whose entire being is owing to God.

What makes it seem otherwise is a misunderstanding, wherein scientific laws are associated with views on which the past is “causally” responsible for the existence of the future. As David Hume clearly saw, however, there is no such relationship. Nothing in our experience answers to it. And although space does not permit a full treatment



of the issue, neither do scientific laws call for some sort of causal glue that binds the universe together over time. Scientific laws are synchronic, not diachronic: they call for actions and reactions that are simultaneous rather than sequential, and measure relationships between variables that coexist rather than succeed one another. It is true that if we *assume* the world will persist, such laws enable us to predict and control the future. But there is nothing in that which gainsays the idea of divine conservation. Indeed, the idea that God, not nature, is responsible for the existence of things may actually help to avoid some embarrassments over event causality.

## Divine Intervention

What, finally, are we to say about scriptural accounts which portray God as more active at some points in history than at others – as intervening to perform miraculous and/or redemptive acts in human history? There are at least two ways of understanding divine intervention that the above account of creation leaves untouched. First, certain manifestations of divine providence may be of special significance, both in making God's loving concern especially apparent to us, and in that had they not occurred, human history would have been vastly different (see Chapter 39, Providence). The rise of Israel in the Hebrew Bible, and the introduction of Christian salvation in the New Testament, can certainly be viewed in this light. It is impossible to imagine what the world would be like today without them, and that remains true even if in fact God's creative activity is equally responsible for everything that has occurred. Second, even though making God the first cause of all does not undermine a correct understanding of secondary causation, there is no reason why every event God produces must be so related to others that no departures from the natural order are possible. There can still occur events that involve such departures, if that is what the concept of a miracle requires (see Chapter 47, Miracles). So the parting of the Red Sea, or the transforming of water into wine at Cana, can still count as divine interventions in the strong sense that the regular course of events is interrupted.

But what is not possible is to think of divine intervention as a phenomenon in which God bestirs God's self from a period of non-engagement with the course of events in our world. If the above argument is correct, the universe could not survive for an instant were God to cease activity as creator. And there is a lot more that is wrong with viewing God as mostly withdrawn from the world's affairs. Merely occasional engagement is not possible for a God who is eternal and unchanging, as the tradition has held (see Chapter 32, Eternity; and Chapter 38, Immutability and Impassibility). Nor is the disinterest this view imputes to God compatible with a providence grounded in complete love, which should rather require God's complete and intimate involvement with all that takes place. Finally, a great deal of scripture speaks of God as fully involved in the course of history. Far from being remote and disinterested, God is held to be the foundation for the being of all things (Romans 11:36), to uphold all things through his power (Hebrews 1:3), and even to have wrought all our works in us (Isaiah 26:12). It is not possible to deal here with the problems concerning freedom and evil implicit in these claims. Whatever their solution may be, it is clear that much of scripture finds no

distance at all between the ongoing career of the world or of anything in it and the creative will of God. The metaphysics of the world's persistence supports such a view.

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## Immutability and Impassibility

RICHARD E. CREEL

Immutability and impassibility have been attributed to God by thinkers including Aristotle, Philo, Boethius, Augustine, Maimonides, Anselm, Aquinas, and, in the twentieth century, Eleonore Stump, Norman Kretzmann, and Thomas Weinandy. Nonetheless, these attributions have always had their critics, and criticism has accelerated because of thinkers such as A. N. Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, Nicolas Wolterstorff, and Richard Swinburne. In this article we explore the concepts of immutability and impassibility, set forth arguments for and against attributing these properties to God, and discuss how these properties relate to one another and to some of the other attributes widely thought to apply to God. "God" shall be used to mean an absolutely perfect being (hereafter an APB).

### Immutability

To say that God is immutable is to say that God cannot change. It would not be enough to say that God *does* not change. That would leave unanswered, "But *could* God change?" The point of the doctrine of divine immutability is that it is impossible for God to change.

Three arguments for attributing immutability to God are as follows. First consider this argument from God's *absolute perfection* (see Chapter 30, Goodness). Anything that is absolutely perfect cannot change by getting better, nor can it change by getting worse, as that which is absolutely perfect cannot deteriorate. But since that which is absolutely perfect cannot get better or worse, then because of its perfection it will and must remain the same. Therefore, since God is absolutely perfect, God cannot change.

Second, consider an argument from God's *absolute simplicity* (see Chapter 31, Simplicity). In order for change to take place in a thing it must have at least two parts. At least one part of that thing must change in order for change to take place in it, and at least one part must stay the same in order for the change to be a change of that thing. Change *of* a thing requires that it continue to exist and retain its identity through the change, which requires that at least one part of the thing stay the same while another part changes. But that which is absolutely simple has no parts; therefore it cannot change. Further, that which is composite, i.e., made up of parts, depends on its parts for its nature and existence, and it depends on something to hold its parts together. But

that which is absolutely perfect cannot depend on anything for its nature, existence, or unity. God is absolutely perfect. Therefore God must be absolutely simple. Therefore God has no parts and cannot change.

Third, consider an argument from God's *eternality*, i.e. *non-temporality* (see Chapter 32, Eternity). For change to take place, something which does not possess a certain property must subsequently come to possess it. Hence, change can take place only in things that exist in time. But according to the classical tradition of Boethius, God is eternal in the sense that God possesses all of God's life simultaneously, i.e., without succession. Hence, because that which changes must exist in time, whereas God's mode of existence (absolutely inclusive simultaneity) is incompatible with existing in time, therefore God must exist outside of time and cannot be mutable.

Two arguments *for* divine mutability are as follows. First consider an argument from *the nature of agency* (see Chapter 36, Divine Action). Surely an APB will have the power of agency, i.e., be able intentionally to cause things to happen. But for an agent intentionally to cause something to happen which was not happening requires that he or she was not willing it and then began to will it – and to change from not willing something to willing it is to change. Therefore, in order to have the power of agency an individual must be able to change. As an APB, God must have the power of agency. Therefore God must be able to change. Therefore God must be mutable.

Second, consider *perfection in knowledge* (see Chapter 28, Omniscience). In order to be perfect in knowledge, God must know things as they are. Some things are changing; therefore God must be aware of things as changing. But awareness of change in an object requires change in the subject who is aware; the subject must change from being aware that  $x$  is not happening to being aware that  $x$  is happening. This argument applies to God even if God knows eternally all that will ever happen, for God must also know what is happening *now*, and what is happening now is changing, so the content of God's awareness must change as actuality changes. Therefore, in order to have perfect knowledge of the world as it is, God must be mutable.

## Impassibility

Philosophers have divided sharply over whether God is immutable, but they generally agree on what they mean by immutability. Regarding impassibility, philosophers are divided over what to mean, as well as by whether to attribute it to God. The definition that seems most basic and useful says that impassibility is the property of being insusceptible to causation. To say that God is impassible is to say that God cannot be affected by anything. Hence, it is not sufficient to say merely that God has not been or never will be affected by anything. Impassibility means it is impossible for God to be passive in relation to anything.

Three arguments *for* divine impassibility go as follows. First, consider that God is *infinite*. To be passible requires a limitation by virtue of which a thing can be affected by something else, as when pressure from a finger changes the shape of a balloon or when a breeze changes the location of a balloon. But God is infinite and therefore has no limitation by virtue of which God can be affected by a finger, a breeze, or anything else. Hence God is impassible.

Second, God is *pure act*. Everything else depends on God's initiative for its existence, so God must exist causally prior to everything else. Unlike anything else, God must exist as a pure act of being, and that which is pure act cannot be passive in any way. Hence, as the only being that exists *a se*, i.e., by virtue of its own essence, and as the creator of all else that exists, it is impossible that God could have been or could be moved by anything to exist, act, or change in any way. Necessarily, God's act precedes all other acts. Hence God is impassible.

Third, an APB by its very nature must be *perfectly blissful*. Being unhappy, sad, miserable, melancholy, and so on, would be incompatible with absolute perfection. Hence, the quality of God's affective life should be thought of as impassible, i.e., beyond the influence of this world.

Three arguments for divine passibility are as follows. First, an APB must be a person and therefore must be able to enter into the give and take of *personal relations*. In order to communicate with and respond to persons, God must be affected by input from them. Hence God must be passible in order to be able to interact with persons.

Second, as an APB God must be *perfect in love*. One who is perfect in love must be touched by the joys and sorrows of the beloved. Any being which is insensitive or indifferent to the joys and sufferings of others is unloving and therefore unworthy of the title "God." Consequently, God must be affected by the joys and sorrows of God's creatures, i.e., God must be emotionally passible in relation to God's creatures.

Third, in order to be *omniscient*, God must be passible, i.e., God's knowledge of the world must be caused by the world. If it were not, God would be ignorant of the world, since if God did not know the world directly, no one and nothing could mediate knowledge of the world to God. It might be argued that God knows the world by way of knowing God's eternal will, which creates the world, and not by way of direct awareness of the world, but that seems unsatisfactory for three reasons. First, such knowledge would be deficient; God would know the world by knowing God's will rather than by knowing what God's will created. Such indirect knowledge would be inferior to direct knowledge and therefore would be unworthy of God. Second, indirect knowledge of the world would smack of Manichaeism, suggesting that God would not be soiled by direct noetic contact with the world. Third, God so conceived would be religiously inadequate. God would not know us; God would know only God's will that we exist. Therefore we could not presume to have a personal relationship with God.

### Toward a Unified Position

Whether within philosophy we should think of God as immutable or mutable, impassible or passible must be deduced from God's nature as an APB. In Creel (1986) I argue that to discuss the issues of divine immutability and impassibility satisfactorily, we need to distinguish four aspects of God: the divine *nature*, *knowledge*, *will*, and *feeling*. It seems universally agreed that the *nature* of an APB, and therefore of God, must be impassible and immutable; i.e., the nature of God cannot change and cannot be determined in any respect by anything external to God.

But is God immutable and impassible in *knowledge*? If God is eternal in Boethius' sense, i.e., is atemporal, then God must be immutable in all ways, including knowledge.

We have, however, seen reasons to think that perfection in knowledge is incompatible with immutability. Hence, we should hold that God is mutable in the facet of God's knowledge that pertains to actualities that change. However, God will have eternal, immutable knowledge of all necessary truths and basic possibilities.

Moreover, just as God's knowledge of actualities must change as actualities change, so must God's knowledge of *temporal* possibilities change. For example, it is eternally possible that there be grandchildren, but it is not eternally possible that *I* have grandchildren. Once upon a time I was a mere possibility that might never have existed, and it is impossible for a mere possibility to have grandchildren, or even to have the possibility of having grandchildren (only actualities have possibilities). Now I am actual and have adult children, so now it is possible that I have a grandchild. Hence, God's knowledge of temporal possibilities must be mutable and passible since it must change as old possibilities pass out of existence and new possibilities come into existence; those changes in God's knowledge must be caused by the changing world of which God is aware. (To be sure, God as pure act of being must precede the existence of all things other than myself, but once other things exist, God's knowledge must follow them, not precede them.)

Further, must not God be mutable to be a person and have the power of agency, i.e., to be able to make decisions and implement them, and to engage in personal relations with others? Here I think the argument for immutability is stronger. Given God's eternal knowledge of all basic possibilities, God does not have to wait on history in order to decide God's will. God can index God's will to all possibilities that can be actualized in the world that God intends to create, and God can do this independently of the existence of the world, whether determinism or libertarianism is true.

But even if God's will is immutable, must not God change in order to *implement* God's will once the possibilities of the world become actual? Imagine I sin and God begins punishing me; then I repent and God ceases punishing me. Even if God has eternally decided to punish me if I commit such a sin in such circumstances and to forgive me if I repent, must not God change from *not* punishing me to punishing me and then from punishing me to not punishing me? I think not. It seems possible, and more compatible with the notion of God as omniscient, infinite, pure act, to think of ourselves as continually embraced in the eternal, unchanging will of God, so that neither God's decision nor God's will ever changes or could need to. What changes is our experience of what God has eternally willed for us. *What* we experience of what God has willed for us will, in part, be contingent on what we do in relation to God's eternally sufficient, unchanging will.

Some critics object that even if this is possible, it is a cold, impersonal conception of God. But what could be more intimate than to think of oneself as and to feel oneself to be wrapped in the eternal, all-sufficient providence of a loving God who wants the best for us, who is and always has been willing the best for us, and who continually accompanies, surrounds, and embraces us in our actuality?

Finally, the question as to whether God should be thought of as impassible in *feeling* is closely tied to the question of the religious adequacy of a conception of God. Properly formulated, the concept of an APB should describe a being worthy of unqualified awe and devotion. Therefore, according to the classical tradition, God should be conceived as eternally, perfectly, impassibly blissful. A deficiency in God's happiness would have



to result from God's very nature or be caused by something external, but God's nature cannot be deficient, so any deficiency would have to be caused by creatures, which are the only things external to God. It seems inappropriate, however, to think that the happiness of an APB could be hostage to the actions or experiences of its creatures. Hence, the most worthy way to conceive of an APB is as blissful, without blemish or variation. Further, it is this conception which best assures that, by the grace of God, creatures may taste God's perfect bliss now and someday share it fully.

Nonetheless, some contemporary thinkers argue that, given the way the world is, a perfectly loving God cannot be perfectly blissful. Feeling is the subjective facet of evaluation, and surely an APB would not evaluate the horrors of human history in a purely intellectual, non-affective way. God, as a perfectly loving, omniscient being, must be perfectly sensitive to the joys and sufferings of *zer* creatures. Because God is loving, God could not but be emotionally affected by, e.g., the horrors inflicted by the Nazi Holocaust and the Ku Klux Klan. Conversely, God cannot but rejoice when a sinner repents or justice triumphs over injustice. If God is unmoved emotionally by such things, God is not someone by whom we can feel loved, or from whom we can seek companionship and solace, or for whom we can feel unqualified admiration and devotion.

Other thinkers object that it is inappropriate to think of God as emotionally buffeted by what goes on in the world. Furthermore, because God knows God is in ultimate control of history and will make sure that good triumphs over evil, God can take abiding joy in that knowledge, and therefore not be affected emotionally by what goes on in the world from moment to moment – even as an experienced person who teaches young children to swim is not callous or remiss to not be emotionally troubled by the children's fear and choking as they learn to swim. She knows she will not let the children suffer irredeemable harm and that eventually they will learn to swim and be delighted to have done so.

To some people, then, an impassibly blissful God seems emotionally indifferent to the world, and that makes God seem impersonal, alien, and therefore religiously unapproachable. To other people the passibilist conception of God makes God seem pathetic or pitiable, as God grieves over tragedies and acts of evil and, according to some passibilists, does so forever. But surely the felt quality of an APB's emotional life would not be pitiable or depend upon creatures' choices.

Perhaps we can save what is most important on each side of this dispute by distinguishing between God being emotionally "touched" and emotionally "crushed" by the experiences and actions of God's creatures. What we should save from the impassibilist position is that God is not emotionally "crushed" by what goes on in the world. God is perfectly, imperturbably happy through enjoyment of God's own perfection, through knowledge of the goodness of God's creation, through enjoyment of the creation, and through knowledge of God's ultimate control over history.

What should be saved from the passibilist position is that God is emotionally touched by the joys and the sufferings and the good and the evil actions of God's creatures. This was not my position in Creel (1986), but now, thanks to my critics, I think an adequate conception of God must include the notion that God is touched by our sufferings and joys, victories and defeats – though not necessarily in the same ways as we are. Omniscience requires that God feels all our joys and sorrows just as we feel them; but God may also feel sad about some of our joys and happy about some of our sufferings.



For example, God may feel sad over the joy that a sadist feels when inflicting suffering, and may feel joy over the chagrin the sadist feels when God repents of God's cruelty. In brief, that God is touched by our joys and sorrows is what must be saved out of the passibilist position in order that we may believe that God cares about us in the deepest sense and therefore is approachable in the richest sense.

In spite of the preceding, I close with a caveat. Emotion, the felt aspect of human evaluation, is intimately tied to physiology. If physiology is essential for emotion, then God, as pure spirit, does not have emotions, so perhaps God lacking emotions and therefore being impassible is no more a defect in God than is God lacking an opposable thumb. This does not mean that without emotion God cannot evaluate anything. Emotion is a separable facet of evaluation, not the whole of it. Humans evaluate things without having felt reactions to them (as often occurs when we read news reports). So evaluation without affect is possible. But affect by its nature is evaluative. To feel sorrow is, ordinarily, to think that something is unfortunate *and* to feel intensely sad about it having happened. Such feelings in humans always have a physiological dimension. Therefore, if God does not have a body, it may be that there is no affective facet to God's evaluations – at least none comparable to those of humans. Many of us like to think that sometimes God shares our emotions and does not merely know them (as when, for example, God feels our grief over the tragic loss of a loved one), but because of the strong, perhaps essential, connection of human emotion and embodiedness we should not without careful reflection project onto God an emotional life that is similar to our own.

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## Providence

THOMAS P. FLINT

Throughout the history of Western monotheism, the belief in divine providence has been a central element of religious faith. The God who has created us, theists insist, has not left us on our own; rather, the events of our world, no matter how chaotic or disturbing they might appear, unfold precisely according to the plan established eternally by our all-knowing and loving sovereign.

In this entry, this traditional notion of providence is first articulated. Two perennial problems raised by the traditional concept, problems concerning freedom and evil, are then described. Next, four general types of reactions to these problems are considered, along with the manners in which these four positions tend to explicate a central component of the Christian conception of providence – namely, predestination. The entry concludes with some evaluative remarks concerning these four pictures of providence.

### The Traditional Notion of Providence

The traditional idea of providence has both biblical and non-biblical roots. Though the word “providence” is nowhere found in the Bible, scripture speaks clearly and repeatedly of a God who knowingly and lovingly exercises detailed control over God’s creation. Nothing, we are told, escapes God’s gaze (see, e.g., Psalm 33:13–15). Whole nations are in God’s hands as is clay in the hands of the potter (Jeremiah 18:1–6). Even seemingly chance events are in fact determined by God (Proverbs 16:33), whose plan provides for the needs of all of God’s children (Matthew 6:26–34). While scriptural sources have been predominant in the development of the notion of providence, other factors have also played a role. Chief among these has undoubtedly been the Greek tradition, which includes influential affirmations of at least a rudimentary notion of providence both by philosophers (e.g., Xenophanes, Plato, and many of the Stoics) and by other literary figures (e.g., Herodotus, Aeschylus, and Sophocles).

The traditional notion of providence which grew from these various roots – a notion defended by such varied historical figures as Philo, Justin Martyr, Origen, Augustine, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Francisco Suarez, and Gottfried Leibniz – is in essence a picture of how a God who is perfect in knowledge, power, and love relates to his creation. Being omniscient

(see Chapter 28, Omniscience), God has complete and detailed knowledge of the world's history, its current state, and its future. Being omnipotent (see Chapter 27, Omnipotence), God has complete and specific control over that world, a world which has developed and will continue to evolve in accord with God's sovereign and never-failing will. Being omnibenevolent (see Chapter 30, Goodness), God has used both knowledge and power to fashion and execute a plan for the world which manifests God's own moral perfection and the inexhaustible love he bears for creation. According to the tradition, then, to see God as provident is to see God as knowingly and lovingly directing each and every event involving each and every creature toward the end God has ordained for them.

## Problems with the Tradition

Despite the dominance of the traditional notion in Western thought, significant questions have been raised about the coherence and the plausibility of that view. Two general problems with the tradition, those concerning human freedom and evil, have elicited the most discussion.

Freedom has been seen as inconsistent with providence because divine providence implies divine foreknowledge, and such foreknowledge seems to rule out human freedom. For if God knows that I will, say, buy an iguana next year, then this is something he has always known. If it is true that God held, say, 10 years ago the relevant belief concerning my future iguana-buying, then the fact that he held this belief is something over which no one now has any control, for no one has power over the past. So I have no control over the fact that God believed 10 years ago that I would buy an iguana next year. Since God cannot possibly be mistaken, God's believing that something will happen entails that the event in question will occur. Therefore, my buying an iguana is a necessary consequence of a fact over which I have no control. Purchasing the iguana, then, is not something I can avoid doing; but if the action is thus unavoidable, it can hardly be considered free. This *argument from foreknowledge* has long been seen as posing a serious challenge to affirming the traditional concept of providence (see Chapter 56, Foreknowledge and Human Freedom).

Evil also appears to challenge divine providence. According to the tradition, God has a plan for the world and its inhabitants, a plan informed not only by knowledge and power, but also by a love for all creatures. The existence of evil, especially evil of great intensity, extent, or duration, seems to disconfirm the existence of such a plan. A God of the traditional description, it has been argued, would surely know how to prevent such evils, have the power to prevent them, and desire that they be prevented. This *argument from evil* thus suggests that the traditional picture of a providential deity is misguided (see Chapter 58, The Logical Problem of Evil; and Chapter 59, The Evidential Problem of Evil).

## Reactions to these Problems

The ways in which advocates of providence have attempted to respond to these problems are many and varied. Though any attempt to categorize the multiform reactions

runs a serious risk of misrepresentation or oversimplification, refusing to categorize them runs perhaps the greater risk of failing to discern the basic choices that the advocate of providence faces. Various systems of categorization might be proposed, but I believe that it is especially illuminating to consider how differing views of freedom lead quite naturally to differing reactions to the two problems with providence we have outlined.

Contemporary philosophers are in basic agreement that there are three general positions open concerning the relationship between freedom and determinism. First, one might endorse both

- (1) all actions are determined ultimately by events external to and not under the causal control of their agents, and
- (2) such determination is incompatible with human freedom.

This position is often referred to as *hard determinism*. Second, one might agree with the existence of the type of determining forces mentioned in (1), yet insist that (2) is false. Only some types of determination, one might contend, render actions unfree. So long as the agent in question is not acting under compulsion, or so long as the agent would have done otherwise had she so chosen, the fact that the action is ultimately externally determined should not be seen as robbing the agent of her freedom. This claim that freedom and determinism are compatible is frequently labeled *compatibilism*. Finally, one might agree with the rejection of compatibilism enunciated by (2), yet repudiate the deterministic claim encapsulated by (1). According to this third position, commonly called *libertarianism*, there are free actions, but no such action can be determined by anything not under the causal control of the agent.

Given these admittedly coarse-grained depictions of positions on freedom, three potential means of reacting to our problems with providence become immediately apparent: one might attempt to defend the traditional view from either a hard determinist, a compatibilist, or a libertarian stance. Call these three positions *determinist traditionalism*, *compatibilist traditionalism*, and *libertarian traditionalism*. As we shall see, some libertarians have argued that the third of these positions is incoherent, and hence that changes in the traditional account of providence need to be made if libertarianism is to be maintained. Hence, a fourth position, what might be called *libertarian revisionism*, must also be considered.

Though some remarks by Luther and other Reformers could be taken as pointing toward it, determinist traditionalism is a position with few explicit prominent adherents. In this view, human freedom is seen as an illusion, given the all-determining activity of God. Hence, in response to the first of our two problems with providence, the determinist traditionalist would resolve things by accepting the arguments for the incompatibility of freedom and providence, retaining the traditional notion of providence, and rejecting the existence of freedom. Evil in such a view would presumably be seen as in some way an instrumental part of God's good plan.

As noted, determinist traditionalism is not a position which has much support. Each of the other three pictures of providence, though, has had numerous able proponents. Let us consider each of these pictures separately.

*Compatibilist traditionalism*

Far more influential than determinist traditionalism has been the second of our four pictures, compatibilist traditionalism. Many of the more ardent defenders of providence, from Reformed thinkers such as Calvin, Leibniz, and Jonathan Edwards to Thomists such as Domingo Banez and Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, clearly belong in this camp, while many others, including such giants as Augustine and Aquinas, might also (though more controversially) be situated here. Compatibilist traditionalists insist that God, as first cause, is the ultimate causal determiner of all that takes place. As compatibilists, such theists insist that the efficacy of divine decrees is not inconsistent with genuine human freedom, for God determines not only the occurrence of events but also their mode (free or unfree). Many Thomists, for example, have argued that our actions would indeed be unfree were they the deterministic causal consequences of prior events, that is, were the type of physical determinism championed by most contemporary compatibilists true. Yet God, they insist, can still determine free actions, because no action can occur without God's concurrent activity. Hence, *as* the human agent acts freely, God simultaneously determines its act, thereby safeguarding both human freedom and divine control.

Compatibilist traditionalists have various means of dealing with the difficulties which freedom seems to raise with the traditional notion of providence. Some would insist that the argument from foreknowledge shows only that our free acts are ultimately under God's control, a conclusion which such theorists would argue ought not to concern us since, to be free, an act need be under only my proximate control, and such control is fully compatible with God's position as first cause. Other compatibilist traditionalists would base their response to the argument from foreknowledge on the thesis of divine eternity. If God is truly outside of time (see Chapter 32, Eternity), then it makes no sense to speak of God as literally foreknowing what will occur; rather, we need to think of God as having timeless awareness of all that occurs in time. Since the argument from foreknowledge was premised on the supposition that God is in time (and hence believed things 10 years ago concerning, e.g., my iguana-buying), that argument dissolves once we see that divine eternity renders that supposition indefensible.

The questions which evil seems to raise for the traditional concept of providence would be addressed in various ways by compatibilist traditionalists. Most would insist that evil be seen as simply part of God's good plan for the world, a part which allows God's nature to be manifested more vividly than would otherwise be possible. Moral evil in particular would be viewed in this way. By seeing to it that some people sin but are still saved, God manifests mercy and forgiveness; by seeing to it that some sin and are damned, God manifests both justice and the gratuitousness of salvation. Not all members of this school would agree, though, on precisely how God sees to it that evil takes place. Some, such as Huldreich Zwingli, suggest that evil can be seen as the direct causal consequence of God's activity. Others, such as Aquinas and many Thomists, insist that God cannot be seen as the actual author of evil. Rather, they suggest, evil occurs not because God causes it, but because he refrains from causing good. Hence, our sinful acts take place not because God causes us to sin, but because God declines to cause us to act virtuously; the evil act which results is thus a product of our own evil nature.



*Libertarian traditionalism*

By far the most prominent libertarian defenders of the traditional concept of providence have been the followers of Luis Molina (and, among the Reformers, of Jacobus Arminius). Molinists maintain that a libertarian account of freedom is both philosophically attractive and fully compatible with a strong picture of providence. As they see it, the key to this compatibility lies in God's possession of what they call *middle knowledge*. In addition to his natural knowledge (knowledge of necessary truths over which he has no control) and his free knowledge (knowledge of contingent truths over which he does have control), God also knows *counterfactuals of maturely freedom* – conditionals specifying, for any free creature who might exist and any set of circumstances in which that creature might be placed and left free, what that creature would freely do if placed in those circumstances. Such conditionals would be contingent (since, according to libertarianism, free beings are not necessitated to act in a certain way by the circumstances in effect when they freely act), but would not be under God's control (since it is not up to God how one of his creatures would freely act); hence, God's knowledge of such truths would be neither natural nor free, but lie in the middle between these two. Given his knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom, God could tailor every action relating to his free creatures so that God achieves each desired goal by putting those creatures into situations in which God sees they will freely act in such a way as to realize those ends. Middle knowledge provides a clear means of explaining how God would possess foreknowledge, since such knowledge would follow immediately upon God's supplementing middle knowledge with a volition to create certain individuals in specific circumstances. Similarly, given the infallibility of God's middle knowledge, it provides an ingenious means of combining a strong, risk-free picture of divine control over human affairs with an uncompromisingly libertarian account of freedom.

Though some libertarian traditionalists would respond to the argument from foreknowledge by appealing to divine eternity, more typical responses are to deny the claim that God's past beliefs are fixed elements of the past beyond our control, or (as Molina argued) to deny that the kind of necessity ascribed to God's past beliefs transfers to the future actions whose performance is entailed by those past beliefs. As for evil, though libertarian traditionalists could concur with compatibilist traditionalists on the fittingness of God's including evil in his world, they would insist that more avenues of response are open to them than to their compatibilist colleagues. For example, it follows from God's possessing middle knowledge that certain worlds which are logically possible for God to create are nevertheless such that God cannot create them, because free creatures would not cooperate in the way necessary for the actuality of those worlds. Hence, certain evils may occur not so much because God preferred that they occur, but because God saw that there was no way to avoid them short of robbing creatures of their freedom.

*Libertarian revisionism*

Especially in recent years, libertarian traditionalism has come under attack by libertarians who charge that middle knowledge is impossible because there are no true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. According to these libertarians, there simply is

no fact of the matter about what a free creature would do in a situation in which she is never placed, and hence nothing here to be known by God. Without middle knowledge, though, there is no way for a God who creates beings free in the libertarian sense to possess the type of knowledge and control affirmed by the tradition. Hence, these theorists conclude, the libertarian has no choice but to abandon that tradition and attempt to construct a revised model of providence.

Some libertarian revisionists (such as process theologians) advocate quite radical alterations in the tradition, such as relinquishing the notion that God is a free creator or rejecting his power ever to interfere with the freedom of his creatures. More influential recently among philosophers of religion has been a less extreme brand of revisionism which speaks of the open or risk-taking nature of God. In this view, a God without middle knowledge has at best knowledge of how his free creatures would *probably* act in various situations. Such probabilistic knowledge is insufficient to provide God with complete foreknowledge and severely limits control over events, since sometimes his free creatures will react in improbable ways. Yet most such theorists look upon these limitations on divine power and knowledge as advantages, not drawbacks, to their position. As they see it, the traditional picture of providence is the unhappy result of an excessive Hellenization of biblical thought, a process which overemphasized the sovereignty and control of God at the expense of the open, responsive, often frustrated but never despairing God of scripture. According to these libertarian revisionists, a God with only probabilistic knowledge of how free creatures will react can still have some foreknowledge and an impressive amount of control, but not so much as to turn all creatures into manipulated puppets with whom God can have no genuinely personal relationships.

The manner in which these revisionists can respond to our two problems with providence should be evident. The argument from foreknowledge, they contend, is sound, and its lesson is that the traditional notion of providence is incoherent. And since God has no better course of action open to him than to follow those general strategies in dealing with every creature which his probabilistic knowledge determines are likely to work for the best, we have no reason to think that the specific evils which occur were either foreseen or in any sense intended by God. Hence, the claim goes, we are no longer inclined on this revised picture to blame God for evil, and so the argument from evil is at least severely weakened.

### Applications to Predestination

One way of spotlighting the differences between these four pictures of providence is to note the divergent analyses they would offer of the central Christian doctrine of predestination. According to this doctrine, salvation is ultimately much more a matter of God's choosing us than of our choosing God. Though under no obligation to bring any human infected with original sin to salvation, God gratuitously elects certain people to be saved and decides upon the specific manner in which this salvation will be effected – that is, God decides which graces will be bestowed upon which people. The effect of this divine election is that the elect are predestined to glory; their eternal bliss is sure to follow upon the natural and supernatural gifts showered upon them.

Few traditional Christians would disagree with this basic explication of the doctrine, but significant disputes have arisen concerning how precisely this sketch is to be filled out. For example, some Christians (most notably, Calvin) have embraced the thesis that God absolutely wills the salvation of only some people, while the others he unconditionally predestines to damnation. Others have rejected this thesis and have insisted that the belief in God's universal salvific will must not be sacrificed in our explication of predestination. Similarly, Christians have disagreed concerning whether God's foreknowledge of how a particular individual will respond to an offer of divine grace is to be thought of as explanatorily prior or posterior to his election of that individual.

The existence and significance of these debates ought not to obscure the substantial agreement among traditional Christians concerning the doctrine of predestination. As one might expect, our four pictures of providence lead to predictably different elucidations of the doctrine. Determinist traditionalists would see freedom as having nothing to do with predestination; salvation is the simple causal effect of divine election, an effect in no way mediated by free human responses. Compatibilist traditionalists could, but need not, agree with this assessment. Though God's causal activities provide the ultimate explanation for everything that happens, many compatibilist traditionalists (e.g., most Thomists) will insist that the transformations which make heaven a fitting abode for the just are brought about via the free actions of the just, though these actions are determined by God's intrinsically efficacious grace. Similarly, many (though not all) compatibilist traditionalists will contend that even those not brought by God to salvation are given by God sufficient aid to make them able (in a compatibilist sense) to attain paradise. Libertarian traditionalists typically will reject the claim that God's grace is intrinsically efficacious. Divine assistance sufficient for salvation, most Molinists will insist, is given to all, but whether such grace is efficacious is ultimately up to the agent, not up to God. Of course, since God's middle knowledge informs God prior to any creative decision on his part just how any bestowal of grace would in fact be freely received, God's power regarding salvation and reprobation remains quite extensive on the Molinist picture. For libertarian revisionists, though, this power is greatly diminished. Since God lacks middle knowledge, he has no way of knowing how his creatures will react to his gracious intervention, and hence cannot genuinely predestine anyone so long as he respects their freedom. Though revisionists thus generally reject the traditional picture of predestination, they insist that God's probabilistic knowledge still affords considerable impact on the lives of all creatures, and they suggest that God can have great confidence that many people will freely accept the offer of salvation, though his knowledge as to the identity of the saved is inevitably largely conjectural.

### Evaluating the Four Pictures

Of the four pictures of providence discussed here, only one – deterministic traditionalism – lacks significant contemporary support. Each of the other three has been graced with vocal and vociferous proponents, and no sign of consensus is in sight.

As I see it, the case in favor of the libertarian traditionalist picture, though not demonstrative, is by far the strongest. Unlike the compatibilist traditionalist, the libertarian is not faced with attempting to defend a picture of freedom which is implausible

philosophically and which can at best offer a convoluted and unsatisfying account of evil and damnation. Unlike the libertarian revisionist, the traditionalist is not forced to view God as having allowed his church to adopt for virtually two millennia a fundamentally distorted picture of his relationship to his world, nor is the traditionalist left in the unsure hands of a myopic God who is little more than a good-hearted, odds-playing “bookie than which none greater can be conceived.” Were the arguments against middle knowledge compelling, the theist would have no choice but to forsake either her libertarian inclinations or her commitment to the traditional notion of providence. Since Molinists have, as I see it, shown that the thesis of divine middle knowledge is resilient in the face of attack, the theist need not and should not embrace either of these unattractive alternatives. Libertarian traditionalism, then, seems the wisest picture of providence for the prudent theist to endorse.

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## Pantheism

MICHAEL LEVINE

Pantheism has generally been seen as the most prominent alternative to theistic notions of deity regarded as unacceptable on religious, affective, and rational grounds. It is differentiated from theism mainly in terms of what some see as problematic aspects of theism. It is, after all, dissatisfaction with theism that in modern times (less clearly in ancient times) has engendered pantheistic views. Pantheism, however, should be distinguished from theism not only in terms of theoretical differences but also in terms of its associated practices. Although they have competing worldviews, belief is not the only place to look for differences between the two. Beliefs and theories constitutive of a worldview engender, and are in turn engendered by, an accompanying ethos. Geertz describes an ethos as “the tone, character, and quality of their life [the lives of those with a particular worldview], its moral and aesthetic style and mood” (1973, p. 90). An ethos is symbiotically related to cognitive aspects of accounts of deity.

The differences between the worldviews and ethos of those who hold theistic versus non-theistic concepts of deity (like competing conceptions among theists and non-theists) are manifest by differences in practice. Those with a non-theistic conception of deity, for example, will generally not pray or worship. In comparing theistic and non-theistic conceptions of deity and trying to understand them, their associated practices are as revealing as an explanation of them in terms of beliefs. If you want to know what someone believes or what it means to believe something, it is necessary, though rarely sufficient (contrary to Wittgensteinian or behaviourist views), to look at what they do. Belief and practice are related, though often in peculiar ways.

It may once have been historical understanding, notions of evidence, a growing awareness of other traditions, scientific understandings (e.g., evolution), and potent philosophical and moral reasoning (Hume’s *Dialogues*) that were behind formulations of different concepts of deity. It is unlikely that they are any longer – at least not in the same way. What now motivates forays to non-theistic concepts of deity like pantheism for those who are so motivated (many having abandoned religious inclination and belief altogether) is the tacit acceptance of all the grounds cited above as providing an epistemic and affective web that in combination make it impossible to do anything but reject theism. For many, theism is no longer, in William James’ terms, a “live option.” It is stone-cold dead.

Many who reject theism also do so because of the ways in which theism has been taken up by theistic traditions. The two – theistic belief and theistic traditions – are not

as distinct as they may appear or as philosophers would like them to be. Theistic traditions reflect notions of a theistic god. To the extent that one finds serious fault with a tradition, the central concept operative in that tradition may also, quite reasonably, be regarded as problematic and rejected.

Thus, policies and practices of theistic traditions that deny fundamental rights to gays and lesbians, discriminate on the basis of gender and race, and condone child molestation and even make sure that those directly responsible like Cardinal Law (moved laterally to Rome) go unpunished have become moral grounds for rejecting not only the traditions themselves but the theistic concepts of deity inherent in them. While the primary post-Holocaust theological problem for Jews was how God could allow such a thing to happen, it has arguably now become – for those who reject any whole-sale identification of Jews with Israel as itself immoral – how Jews *qua* Jews and as victims could commit atrocities against the virtually helpless Palestinians. Traditional religion and the political status quo are seen by many as mutually supportive and this plays no small part in the rejection of theistic traditions and theism.

### What is Pantheism?

Pantheism is a metaphysical and religious position. Broadly defined, it is the view that (1) “God is everything and everything is God ... the world is either identical with God or in some way a self-expression of his nature” (Owen 1971, p. 74). Similarly, it is the view that (2) everything that exists constitutes a “unity” and this all-inclusive unity is in some sense divine (MacIntyre 1967, p. 34). A slightly more specific definition is given by Owen, who says (3) “Pantheism ... signifies the belief that every existing entity is, only one Being; and that all other forms of reality are either modes (or appearances) of it or identical with it” (1971, p. 65). Even with these definitions there is dispute as to just how pantheism is to be understood and who is and is not a pantheist. Aside from Spinoza, other possible pantheists include some of the Presocratics, Plato, Lao Tzu, Plotinus, Schelling, Hegel, Bruno, Eriugena, and Paul Tillich. Possible pantheists among literary figures include Emerson, Walt Whitman, D. H. Lawrence, and Robinson Jeffers. A popularly identifiable pantheist is Obi-Wan Kenobi of *Star Wars* fame. For a ready notion of just what pantheism is, the “Force” (“may the Force be with you”) in *Star Wars*, while very different from Spinoza’s singular but fecund substance, is as good a popularization as one is likely to find. Spinoza’s *Ethics*, finished in 1675, two years before his death, is generally regarded as the most thoroughgoing account of a particular pantheistic position. Pantheism is the traditional religious alternative to theism, and many profess pantheistic beliefs – often obscurely. Think of the last time someone said to you “Well, I don’t believe in God. But I believe in *something*.” The central claims of pantheism are *prima facie* no more fantastic than those of theism – and probably less so.

### Unity and Divinity

Different versions of pantheism offer different accounts of “unity,” and “divinity.” Perhaps the central problem of pantheism is to determine just how to understand



these central terms. For example, philosophical Daoism is one of the best articulated and thoroughly pantheistic positions there is. The *Tao* is the central unifying feature, but just what is meant by the *Tao*, and understanding how it operates and its implications, requires a great deal of interpretation. What kind of unity is (or should be) claimed by pantheists and which, if any, is plausible? There may be acceptable alternative criteria. Like theism, pantheism is by no means a univocal view.

Attributing unity simply on the basis of all-inclusiveness is irrelevant to pantheism. To understand the world as “everything” is to attribute a sense of unity to the world, but there is no reason to suppose this sense of all-inclusiveness is the pantheistically relevant unity. Similarly, unity as mere numerical, class, or categorical unity is irrelevant, since just about anything (and everything) can be “one” or a “unity” in these senses. Formal unity neither entails or is entailed by types of unity (e.g., substantial unity) sometimes taken to be unity. Hegel’s “Geist,” Lao Tzu’s “Tao,” Plotinus’ “One,” and arguably Spinoza’s “substance,” are independent of this kind of formal unity.

Unity is explained in ways that are often interrelated. Unity is interpreted 1) ontologically; 2) naturalistically – in terms of ordering principle(s), force(s) or plans; 3) substantively – where this is distinguished from “ontologically”; and 4) genealogically – in terms of origin. Christopher Rowe calls for a “genealogical model of explanation” of unity (1980, p. 57). “Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes, the Milesian monists appear to have claimed that what unifies the world is that it sprang from a single undifferentiated substance.”

Unity may also be explained in terms of divinity. The all-inclusive whole may be a unity because it is divine, either in itself (Spinoza’s substance), or because of a divine power informing it. This is the case with some Presocratics for whom the unifying principle is divine because it is immortal and indestructible. But this does not satisfactorily explain the relation between unity and divinity, or why divinity might be seen as a basis of unity. Less naturally, the question arises as to whether the all-inclusive whole is divine because it is a unity.

“Divine” is defined as pertaining to God (“of, from, or like a god”), but also as sacred or holy. Why do pantheists ascribe divinity to unity? The reason is similar to why theists describe God as holy. They experience it as such. In Rudolf Otto’s (1950) experiential account, that which is divine is what evokes the numinous experience. This can be a theistic God, but it can also be a pantheistic unity. When looked at in terms of how the concept of divinity functions intellectually and affectively (e.g., its ethical, soteriological, and explanatory roles), its application in theism and pantheism is much the same. There is no reason to suppose the idea of “divinity” relevant to pantheism should be modeled after a specific tradition’s concept. Whatever criteria are decided upon as necessary for attributing divinity to something, one cannot decide *a priori* that the possession of divinity requires personhood without ruling out the possibility of the most typical types of pantheism (i.e., non-personal types). After all, theism is what pantheism is most of all trying to distance itself from. Spinoza’s God and Lao Tzu’s “Tao,” for example, are distinctly non-personal, as are the governing principles of the Presocratics.



## Pantheism, Theism, Atheism, and Monism

Where pantheism is considered an alternative to theism, it involves the denial of at least one, and usually both, central theistic claims. Theism is the belief in a personal God which in some sense transcends the world. Pantheists usually deny the existence of a personal God – a “minded” Being that possesses the properties of a “person,” such as having intentional states. There can be a number of reasons for this denial. For example, though pantheists are not atheists, they may, like some atheists (and some theists) think that given the evil in the world it makes little if any sense to suppose that an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good deity exists. Taken as an alternative to, and denial of, theism and atheism, pantheists deny that what they mean by God is completely transcendent. They deny that God is “totally other” than the world or ontologically distinct from it. The dichotomy between transcendence and immanence has been a principal source of philosophical and religious concern in Western and non-Western traditions, and all major traditions have at times turned to pantheism as a way of resolving difficulties with the theistic notion of a transcendent deity.

Not all of the problems generated by the theistic notion of God are also problems for pantheism. But given a suitable reformulation, some of them will be. Pantheism will also generate difficulties peculiar to itself. Thus, although evil and creation do not present identical problems for pantheism and theism, it may be possible to reformulate them in a way that makes them applicable to pantheism. Perhaps too, they can be resolved by pantheism.

Like “atheism,” the term “pantheism” was used in the eighteenth century as a term of “theological abuse,” and it often still is. A. H. Armstrong says the term “pantheistic” is a “large, vague term of theological abuse” (Armstrong 1976, p. 187). With some exceptions, pantheism is non-theistic, but it is not atheistic. It is a form of non-theistic monotheism, or even non-personal theism. The primary reason for equating pantheism with atheism is the assumption that belief in any kind of “God” must be belief in a personalistic God, because God must be a person.

In his non-pantheistic phase, Coleridge claimed that “every thing God, and no God, are identical positions” (McFarland 1969, p. 228). Owen says, “if God (theos) is identical with the Universe (to pan) it is merely another name for the Universe. It is therefore bereft of any distinctive meaning; so that pantheism is equivalent to atheism” (1971, pp. 69–70). Similarly, Schopenhauer said that “to call the world God is not to explain it; it is only to enrich our language with a superfluous synonym for the word ‘world’ ” (1951, p. 40). If what Schopenhauer, Coleridge, Owen, and others want to show is that believing in a pantheistic God is a confused way of believing in something that can adequately be described apart from any notion of deity, they are mistaken.

Following a long and still current tradition, Owen claimed that “Pantheists are monists ... they believe that there is only one Being, and that all other forms of reality are either modes (or appearances) of it or identical with it” (1971, p. 65). Although, like Spinoza, some pantheists may also be monists, and monism is essential to some versions of pantheism, like Spinoza’s, pantheists need not be monists. They may believe that there are many things and kinds of things and many different kinds of value. The connection between Spinoza’s monism and his pantheism does not rest on an

identification of the two positions, but is instead the result of the wider metaphysical position constructed in his *Ethics*.

## Evil

The problem of evil is a product of theism and not directly pertinent to pantheism. It is not, as Owen claims, “an embarrassment” to pantheists, intellectually speaking, nor can it be (1971, p. 72). This reiterates the common view among Spinoza’s earliest critics that pantheism, unlike theism, can neither account for evil nor offer any resolution to the problem of evil. The theistic problem of evil cannot be relevant to pantheism since, with the possible exception of acknowledging the presence of evil, pantheism rejects all aspects of theism that generate the problem. Pantheism does not claim that its divine unity is a morally perfect, omniscient, and omnipotent being. The existence of evil may be regarded as incongruous with unity, but this needs to be argued. In theism it is generally assumed the divine cannot also be, in part, evil. Pantheism need not make such an assumption – though some, like Spinoza, do. Even in Otto’s account, the holy has a demonic aspect.

Pantheism, as a worldview and religion, needs to address evil and associated moral issues. It offers its own formulation(s) of a “problem of evil” and its own responses. However, the very idea of evil may be something the pantheist wishes to eschew. “Evil” is essentially a metaphysical rather than a moral concept, or it is a moral concept with a theistic metaphysical commitment. The pantheist may prefer, as many contemporary ethical theorists do, to talk of what is morally right and wrong. The term “evil” may be applied to extreme instances of moral wrongness, but it would be understood in a sense divorced from its theological and metaphysical context.

## Pantheism in Practice: Worship, Prayer, Ecology

Worship and prayer are not suitable to pantheism. It is not that such practices are idolatrous, as some theists claim, but something more basic. Whether petitionary or devotional, worship and especially prayer are basically directed at “persons” – beings regarded as separate and superior. What form might a distinctively pantheistic type of practice take? In pantheism there is no apparent community of believers organized by, or focused on, an established body of teaching and scripture. Pantheists may find themselves wanting to practice their faith by seeking to relate their actions to their beliefs, and yet wondering how to go about it. Given that belief and practice define and explain one another as they mutually develop, it may not be possible, not for long at any rate, to keep the question of what pantheists believe distinct from the question of what they do. Since pantheistic and theistic accounts of God and the world are best regarded as mutually exclusive, their practices are likely to be dissimilar.

Pantheism is often taken to be inherently sympathetic to ecological concerns. There is a tendency to picture pantheists (other than Spinoza) in pastoral settings. This has roots in the Stoics’ veneration of nature, and in the later nature mysticism, and perhaps pantheism, of nineteenth-century poets such as Wordsworth and Whitman. It has been

fostered in the twentieth century by pantheists such as John Muir, Robinson Jeffers, D. H. Lawrence, and Gary Snyder, who identify with and extol nature, and claim a close association with nature is necessary to well-being. Identification with an all-inclusive divine unity is seen as the basis for an ethical framework and way of life that extends to non-human and non-living things.

Perhaps pantheists can see ethics and ecology as separate from other more general pantheistic views. A kind of separation between church and environment might be proposed, though this is unlikely. The pantheist, like the theist or atheist, takes the nature of reality as determinative of ethical requirements. Since unity is predicated upon some evaluative consideration (e.g., the divine unity being constituted on the basis of "goodness"), value is a focal point for the pantheist. Just as for theism, ethical and evaluative concerns are connected to God's alleged goodness and nature.

Is the urban person at a religious disadvantage from a pantheistic perspective? Is there reason to believe a pantheist who prefers an urban to a pastoral setting, and who likes technology, is risking spiritual depravity? The pantheist may see much, or too much, technology and the urban as inimical to unity and well-being, or as undermining the values pantheism seeks to promote. However, since the world is increasingly urban, for pantheism to be viable it must be possible to practice it in cities.

### Salvation, Purpose, and Immortality

Pantheistic ethics are most notably likely to be Aristotelian. "The good life" as a regulative ideal – an end to be strived for – dominates. Like the Aristotelian, Platonist, and theist, the pantheist supposes that there is an essential human nature. Goals or ends that a person *qua* person should achieve for well-being and happiness are derived from an account of human nature. Well-being and happiness are largely functions of how well one fulfills one's essential nature (cf. Taylor 1975, p. 132). Pantheism's wide conception of human nature, broader than theism's for example, allows for a correspondingly broad range of ways for people to achieve well-being. Pantheism is non-anthropocentric. Human good is characterized partly in terms of relations to others and to the unity. When people exemplify their essential human nature in this way – and it can only be exemplified in this relational way – they are living the "good life." This non-anthropocentric conception of human well-being constitutes pantheism's standard of human perfection and virtue.

The denial of personal immortality is one of pantheism's most distinctive features, and it may have implications for one's choices in life. Goals, relationships, and vocations may be affected by the belief that death is, or is not, the end of the individual. Some pantheists believe in types of non-personal immortality (e.g., Spinoza and Robinson Jeffers), and they reject the view that personal immortality is more valuable than impersonal immortality. Robinson Jeffers suggests that what may be significant for the pantheist is the denial of personal immortality and recognition of the individual as a part of the "one organic whole ... this one God." He says that the

parts change and pass, or die, people and races and rocks and stars ... [but the whole remains] ... all its parts are different expressions of the same energy, and they are all in

communication with each other, influencing each other, [and are] therefore parts of one organic whole. ... [T]his whole alone is worthy of the deeper sort of love; and ... there is peace, freedom, I might say a kind of salvation, in turning one's affections outward toward this one God, rather than inwards on one's self, or on humanity." (Sessions 1977, 481–528)

Jeffers suggests that "salvation" or immortality is not a matter of life after death, but consists in the recognition, when alive, of the oneness or unity of everything.

The pantheist is likely to view goals that most religious traditions envision as products of wishful thinking, and in any case, as neither believable nor desirable. The state sought by the pantheist supervenes (as in Daoism) on establishing a right relation to unity by cultivating a suitable life. This is a goal in itself. Much as Kierkegaard denied that "truth," "subjectivity," or even "immortality" is attainable once and for all, pantheists see their goal as a state of well-being that ebbs and flows. Being partly dependent upon other people and things, this goal is not achievable in isolation. It involves a this-worldly utopian vision to which a striving for morality, justice, and well-being are essential.

### An Alternative View of Pantheism?

As explained above, pantheism maintains, even if it does not entail, the denial of the two key claims of theism: (1) that god is a "person," and (2) that god is ontologically distinct from and transcendent to all else that exists. As such, critics may seek to show that there are versions of pantheism or something like it, in which one or both of these conditions are not met. This definition, however, is not meant to be an analytical truth, but to capture what is crucial to pantheism if it is to be a genuine religious alternative to theism – one that makes a practical difference and a difference in practice (Levine 1994, pp. 1–143). That is why pantheism is and historically has been of interest; because it offers the possibility of a religious alternative to theism. Where are present the two aspects of theism that pantheism allegedly denies, religious practice (worship, prayer, etc.) will be dictated by these theistic components rather than by pantheistic ones. If so, it is wrong to suggest that this definition, even if mistaken, is merely stipulative. It is meant to capture what is crucial to pantheism as an alternative to theism. Pantheism is to be distinguished from panentheism in much the same way and for the same basic reason.

Dirk Baltzly therefore may be missing the point of the above definition when he says:

The way the Stoics regard god is inconsistent with, say, Spinoza's treatment of god. But to suppose that this means the Stoics are not pantheists is to make Spinoza not merely a highly visible *representative* of pantheism but rather *paradigmatic* of pantheism. Everyone is entitled to use terms like 'pantheism' as he sees fit, but I think that being too narrow about what counts as a pantheist view probably invests the concept with more precision than it has historically had. If, however, you consult your intuitions about the necessary and sufficient conditions for 'x is a pantheist view' and find that these intuitions rule out candidates that involve providence or a personal god, then read this paper as an essay on something *a bit* like pantheism in Stoic philosophy. Perhaps you would prefer to label it

'panentheistic.' I won't mind: I'll just envy you your finely articulated intuitions on what counts as pantheism. (2003, p. 4)

The definition does imply a denial of the view that "Everyone is entitled to use terms like 'pantheism' as he sees fit," and it does concern the preciseness of one's intuitions. It is meant to capture something of the essential difference between pantheism on the one hand, and panentheism or theism on the other – when viewed as a religious/philosophical alternative to theism. The definition is normative, but in a way that that is meant to do justice, conceptually and historically, to various versions of pantheism. It is meant to be indicative of why Spinoza's view is representative of pantheism *per se* in important ways. (It is probably not paradigmatic in denying free will.) Efforts to show that there are elements of pantheism in Stoic philosophy alongside theistic ones need not deny any of this.

Baltzly's interpretation of the Stoics as both pantheists and theists arguably runs into less difficulty in terms of the claim that the Stoics see all that exists as a divine unity, than it does with the claim that they also see it theistically, as a personal god – and associated with, for example, notions of divine providence, agency, immutability, intelligence, and rationality (Baltzly 2003). His general strategy here is to claim that such issues are no more problematic for Stoic theism than for theism generally. They are, however, no less problematic either. If, for example, any acceptable, let alone plausible, theism must deny God's impassibility or immutability, then the fact that Stoic theism is committed to such a view about the nature of God renders it problematic (see Chapter 38, Immutability and Impassability). And if the Stoic view of God is unacceptably problematic or no part of the ordinary theistic understanding of God, then it may be preferable to deny that the Stoics are theists – where ordinarily a theistic god is not taken to be impassable or immutable. Since the Stoics were also polytheists, and theism as contrasted with pantheism generally maintains a single god ontologically distinct from the world, the idea that the Stoics were theistic in the relevant sense may be further questioned. Polytheism may not be compatible with theism as used in the context of distinguishing pantheism from theism.

Furthermore, to assert that "far from being congenial to a deep ecology ethic that locates divinity and thus value in nature, Stoic pantheism is breath-takingly anthropocentric," seemingly on the basis of a single quotation (Cicero), is problematic (Baltzly 2003, p. 15). Seeing moral virtue as the only good and as residing in persons may or may not be antithetical to a deep ecology that sees living in accordance with nature as necessary for well-being and happiness (cf. Baltzly 2003, p. 17). More significantly, however, it is not uncongenial with the pantheistic identification with, and attitudes toward, nature, and with seeing one's own well-being as irreducibly bound with nature. What it is incompatible with is an anthropocentrism that deprecates connections between nature and human flourishing.

Additionally, it is important when discussing pantheism in relation to theism to re-examine but not to reinvent a well-worn wheel. Charles Hartshorne, as a proponent of dipolar theism or panentheism, made it a good part of his life's work to show that theism has pantheistic elements in it and that philosophical systems that are primarily pantheistic also have theistic elements in them (and he discusses the Stoics) (Hartshorne & Reese 1953). Consider, for example, Anselm, who says, "For nothing contains thee,

but thou containest all" (Cf. *Proslogion*, chs. 19–20). Paul says, "we live and move and have our being" in God (Acts 17:28). Jeremiah says, "Do I not fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord" (23:24). Aquinas says, "spiritual things contain the things in which they are; as the soul contains the body. So, too, God is in things as containing them. Nevertheless ... it is said that all things are in God inasmuch as they are contained by Him" (*Summa Theologiae*, I.8.1, reply objection 2). It seems undeniable, though it usually is denied, that pantheism is intimated in these quotations.

An analogy may be useful in considering the definition of pantheism. Buddhism, as well as philosophical Daoism, is generally and rightly considered to be non-theistic and/or atheistic. (Daoism is arguably pantheistic.) However, in terms of religious practice in certain sects and types of Buddhism and Daoism, not only are certain deities worshipped, invoked, and mediated upon, but theistic practices may be present in other ways as well. Does this make Buddhism or philosophical Daoism theistic or polytheistic? Perhaps the easiest way to answer this question is to draw the distinction between philosophical underpinnings (or belief) and practice, and to deny and consider it naive to expect that they would or should completely coincide or accurately reflect one another. Buddhism is properly regarded as non-theistic because of its basic philosophical, religious tenets – its fundamental understanding of reality. Various theistically oriented religious practices need not be taken as undermining Buddhism's non-theistic (atheistic) stance, nor need they be explained away.

### Whither Pantheism?

The principal reason there has been relatively little advance in examining pantheism philosophically is at least twofold. First, contemporary analytic philosophy of religion remains dominated not merely by theism but by peculiar fundamentalist Christian approaches to theism. Plantinga and Wolterstorff's *Faith and Rationality* (1983), Wolterstorff's *Divine Discourse* (1995), and Alston's *Perceiving God* (1991) are examples, but so too are the creationist doctrines of Haldane (Smart and Haldane 1996) and van Inwagen (1995) – the oddest of them all. While there is currently debate about whether creationism should be taught alongside evolution in public schools, the fact that creationist doctrine is argued for by Christian analytic philosophers of religion (regarded as mainstream) goes largely unnoticed or remarked upon (Levine 1998; 1999; 2000). There is little room or interest in non-fundamentalist, theologically progressive notions of deity in this milieu – let alone pantheism. There are only two twentieth-century bibliographical references in the entry on pantheism in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, version 1 (Yandell 1998), where the primary focus is an exposition of Spinoza's pantheism.

Secondly, while non-Western and comparative approaches to philosophy of religion – the other arena in which pantheism is likely to be discussed – are no longer as concerned with a rapprochement to Western theism as they once were (its *raison d'être* in the 1950s), the agenda remains largely religious. Philosophers working in Buddhist and other traditions are engaged in first-order philosophical speculation, analytic expositions, and philosophical/religious reconstructions of their own. As with the case of contemporary philosophy of religion, much of this is religiously motivated – to prove,



for example, that aspects of Buddhist doctrine are true. If the philosophical investigation of pantheism as the denial of theism is to advance, it will have to distance itself – theoretically, practically, and religiously – from philosophy of religion, Western and Eastern, in which revealed religion, rather than natural theology (Humean natural theology), informs the structure and nature of inquiry.

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## Religious Language

JANET SOSKICE

The young Pip, hero of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, had some trouble with religious language. He was fond of reading the family tombstones, he tells us, and

At the time when I stood there in the churchyard ... I had just enough learning to be able to spell them out. My construction of their simple meaning was not very correct, for I read 'wife of the Above' as a complimentary reference to my father's exaltation to a better world; and if any one of my deceased relations had been referred to as 'Below', I have no doubt I should have formed the worst opinions of that member of the family. Neither were my notions of the theological position to which my Catechism bound me at all accurate; for I have a lively remembrance that I supposed my declaration that I was to 'walk in the same all the days of my life', laid me under an obligation always to go through the village from our house in one particular direction, and never to vary it by turning down by the wheelwright's or up by the mill. (Dickens 1996, p. 39)

Pip reads the literal language of the inscriptions as figurative and understands the figurative language of his catechism as literal. But no wonder the child is confused. No wonder well-educated adults are sometimes confused by religious language, for what is required is far more than an ability to "spell out the words." Pip's confusion is not so unlike that of the theology student who falls silent at that part of the creed where he is meant to confess that Christ "descended into hell." He cannot, he feels, believe in a three-tiered universe where the damned live in fire beneath the earth's crust. He may be put at rest by the suggestion that the creedal intention was probably not so much geological as soteriological, drawing attention to ancient Christian beliefs that the salvation effected by Christ extends throughout time (past, present, and future), and that this is tied up with the notion of the "harrowing of hell" where Christ saves the faithful women and men from the Old Testament. (Christian iconography frequently showed Christ leading Adam and Eve, on either hand, out of hell.) The theological student might, of course, want to reject as meaningless this more historically nuanced construal of the creed, along with his first, literal, one – he might wonder how it can make sense to speak of Christ being "present" to the past, or question the meaningfulness of the language of "salvation" altogether, but in doing so he is doing something rather different than rejecting a three-tier universe (see Chapter 74, Resurrection, Heaven, and Hell).

While “descended into hell” holds different difficulties than Pip’s “wife of the Above,” both illustrate that religious language is above all placed language. The contemporary analysis of religious language is above all aware that its construal requires some understanding of life and practice (Alston 1989), and above all location within the religious traditions and symbolisms of which it is part (1989, p. 8). This being said, amongst the “places” or “practices” must also be the language of theological abstraction (as in mystical and negative theology) and of more purely philosophical discussions of the existence and nature of God. Thomas Aquinas makes a distinction in the *Summa Theologiae* between the claims of *sacra doctrina* – revealed and to his mind privileged Christian teaching, especially in the Bible – and *theologia*, the speaking about God in which “pagan” philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, as well as Christian writers, engaged. Yet the religious language of both poses philosophical problems; the language of scripture is replete with metaphors, for instance, whose construals are not obvious. And the language of philosophical abstraction, while apparently more straightforward, contains its own layered complexity. If we say “God made the world” or even “God caused the world to come into being,” we clearly speak of a “making” or “causing” quite different from that proper to human agents (see Chapter 37, Creation and Conservation). Yet it is difficult to see what features these divine and human “makings” share. To say that God “caused” the world to come into being *except that*, since time and space are both features of the world God “caused,” God “caused” the world to come into being “outside of” space and time, is scarcely to make a slight qualification. What can our language of causation mean when applied to one who is creator of space and time? Aquinas resolved some of these difficulties by means of his theory of analogy which he believed allowed us to say, for example, that God is “good” and the cause of goodness in creatures, without implying that we can comprehend what “goodness” (see Chapter 30, Goodness) fully means when predicated of God. “‘God is good’ therefore does not mean the same as ‘God is the cause of goodness’ ... it means what we call ‘goodness’ in creatures pre-exists in God in a higher way” (*Summa Theologiae* Ia.13.2). Aquinas’ theory of meaning may no longer convince, but he can at least be credited with seeing the difficulties of God-talk, whether it be in the language of faith or that of philosophical abstraction.

From the outset Jewish and Christian texts (those most influential for Western philosophy) concerned themselves with the words. God is represented in Genesis as “speaking” the world into being, and, in the already Platonized prologue to John’s gospel, Christ is said to be the incarnate Word (Logos) through whom all is made. In Genesis again, the arrogance of the citizens of Babel is punished by destruction of their tower and confusion of their tongues. The idea of a lost original grammar where words faultlessly matched “things” was to have a long fascination for European philosophers and linguists.

The inadequacy of human speech to speak of God was a concomitant of Judaism’s radical monotheism – God is too holy even to be named. Within Christianity, from its earliest centuries, God’s self-disclosure to Moses from the burning bush (Exodus 3) as “I am who I am” was held to have the greatest religious and philosophical significance. While modern biblical scholarship would caution against reading this kind of metaphysical ultimacy into the Hebrew text, theologians like Pseudo-Dionysius (5th–6th century CE) made much of the idea that God is too holy, too “other” to be named or

captured adequately by any predicates applicable to creatures. God can only be named by what God is not, and in every case speech must be guided by what is revealed by scripture.

[T]he inscrutable One is out of reach of every rational process. Nor can any words come up to the inexpressible Good, this One, this Source of all unity, this supra-existent Being. Mind beyond mind, word beyond speech, it is gathered up by no discourse, by no intuition, by no name. (*The Divine Names*, pp. 49–50)

This kind of meditation is by no means restricted to a mystical fringe. Augustine in *The Confessions* is equally mindful of the inexpressibility of the God who is everywhere present to him.

Anselm's famous argument in the *Proslogion*, if not successful as a "proof for the existence of God," nonetheless provides a high-water mark for religious language within this apophatic tradition. By his invocation of God as "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" Anselm speaks of God but avoids suggesting that God can be conceived. God can at best be invoked in prayer as that beyond naming and knowing. Anselm's Jewish near-contemporary, Moses Maimonides (1135–1204) writes similarly of the Tetragrammaton (the divine name) that "the majesty of the name and the dread of uttering it, are connected with the fact that it denotes God Himself." Thomas Aquinas distanced himself from any attempts to define God into existence, but believed that God's existence could be known by natural reason from God's effects. The names or attributes of God (simplicity, impassibility, limitlessness, and so on) are derived from these; yet, while these predicates have an initial substantive appearance, in reality they are negative and amount to glosses on what it might be to be "the Uncaused Cause" (see Chapter 31, Simplicity; and Chapter 38, Immutability and Impassibility). To say that God is eternal is to say that God is not a "creature" of space and time, and so on (see Chapter 32, Eternity).

Such strategies of reverent agnosticism were employed by the early theologians as a corrective against the human presumption to speak about that which cannot be named, but also to complement the positive and revealed knowledge of God they took as given in scripture. In later centuries this "knowing ignorance" could be given more skeptical twists.

The modern English debate on religious language begins effectively with David Hume. Between the thirteenth and the eighteenth centuries much had taken place to affect European religious thought – the collapse of scholasticism, the rise of humanism and attendant suspicion, from both philosophical and theological quarters, of argumentation that was perceived to be speculative or metaphysical. Newton's new science disclosed a cosmos so apparently well-ordered as to evoke the lyric arguments from design which Hume was to dispatch in his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*. Cleanthes in the *Dialogues* represents the Newtonesque apologist for design. It is less often remarked that Demea represents not just the orthodox faithful, but the "mystical" or apophatic strand of Christian thought mentioned above – all human language falls short of the glory of God. Hume is quick to suggest this pious agnosticism has little to differentiate it from a more open skepticism. If so little can be said positively of God, then perhaps nothing should be? Hume's *Natural History of Religion*, with its

mock-historical account of the “origins” of religious belief, proposes that the divine names arose quite naturally as servile worshippers, fearful for their own security, sought more and more exalted titles with which to flatter their gods (see Chapter 13, Early Modern Philosophical Theology in Great Britain). Within Hume’s work it is possible to detect the seeds of two of the most devastating critiques of religious language in the modern period: first, that religious language is vapid or meaningless; and second, that, if one can speak of meaning, then certainly it is not the “meaning” religious people naively take it to be. Talk about God, on this argument, is quite literally talk about man writ large (Ludwig Feuerbach), or is the sigh of an oppressed creature (Karl Marx), or an indication of a disposition to behave in certain ways (R. B. Braithwaite).

Philosophy in the twentieth century has been preoccupied with questions of language. If Kant set out to sketch the bounds of what we might reasonably claim to know, then twentieth-century philosophy has been concerned with what we might reasonably and meaningfully say. In the 1930s A. J. Ayer’s *Language, Truth and Logic* popularized logical positivism in the English-speaking philosophical world and, in doing so, set a tone of philosophical hostility toward all attempts to articulate religious thought which would last for a generation. The positivists sought to weed out from scientific and philosophical assertions claims that were not so much false as, quite literally, meaningless. Ayer proposed a “verification principle” which, in its earliest formulation, suggested that in order for a statement to have factual significance one must be able to say what empirical observations would count decisively for or against its truth. Although Ayer’s gunsights when framing his “verification principle” were not aimed only at religion, religious claims were amongst those least likely to be judged meaningful by its standards. The verification principle subsequently dissolved in its own acids, but for religious language the challenge stood (see Chapter 54, The Verificationist Challenge). Are religious claims, if not verifiable, then at least in principle open to falsification, and if not, how can they claim to be meaningful? John Wisdom’s parable of the “invisible gardener” (a clearing in the jungle appears to have benefited from a gardener’s touch, yet no gardener has been seen near it) launched a debate on theology and falsification in which the participants debated what might have to happen to cause one to abandon an assertion such as “God loves us.” In a related article, but within the same “spirit of empiricism,” Braithwaite floated the substantially non-cognitivist thesis that religious assertions should be understood “as being primarily ... declarations of commitment to a way of life” (Mitchell 1971, p. 80).

Of inestimable influence during the second part of the twentieth century was the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein (see Chapter 19, Wittgenstein). After an early positivist phase, Wittgenstein distanced himself from Bertrand Russell’s insistence that ordinary language embodied the metaphysics of the Stone Age. The *Philosophical Investigations* make evident Wittgenstein’s conviction that ordinary language is fine as it stands, and that most philosophical problems arise when philosophers ask inappropriate questions of a language “on idle.” Wittgenstein’s dictum, “don’t ask for meaning, ask for use,” encouraged movement away from the rather sterile ground mapped, to their own advantage, by “verificationists” and “falsificationists” onto consideration of the specificities of actual religious language. They include the varied contexts of the language of

prayer, praise, moral injunction, and so on, but also of the rhetorical and textual structures found in religious writings.

Ian Ramsey's *Religious Language*, though admittedly more in the "empiricist" camp than displaying evident influence of Wittgenstein, was a pioneering book in the consideration of "ordinary" religious language. Religious claims, according to Ramsey, should properly be considered as qualified models, or stories, which under the right circumstances can bring about religious discernment ("the penny drops"). Ramsey was at pains to insist that this language, though "logically odd," was in some sense genuinely descriptive ("about God") and not in some merely Braithwaitean sense about moral commitment to pursue a way of life.

While the invocation of models goes a good way toward showing how one might find religious language "meaningful," it was not evident from Ramsey's "Christian empiricism" how these disclosure situations might claim to be more than emotive response. Neo-Feuerbachians and antirealists, such as Don Cupitt, are content to find religious language "meaningful," without committing themselves to belief in some absolute being who transcends the world. Some consideration of the issue of reference seems still to be required (see Chapter 76, Theological Realism and Antirealism).

One great beneficiary of the new willingness to consider ordinary language was metaphor. That religious texts are highly metaphorical was disputed by no one. What was in question was what, if anything, might be the cognitive status of ineliminably metaphorical language. Earlier empiricists had dismissed metaphor as rhetorical ornamentation, part and parcel of the sophistries which true philosophers should "consign to the flames." But if we can only speak figuratively of God, where is the bedrock of speech? Closer attention reveals metaphor to be an important constituent of all language, and as a kind of language use, not a type of truth ("merely metaphorical"). Nor does the fact that an expression is metaphorical mean that it is not referential. Metaphors are particularly useful in areas where we need to be descriptively tentative but wish nonetheless to say something. One such area is the language of scientific theory construction, and the work of philosophers of science such as Mary Hesse has been drawn on by philosophers of religion in developing their discussion of the models and metaphors in religious language as "reality depicting" (Soskice 1985).

From an interest in metaphor must soon follow interest in the interpretation of texts. Metaphors can be construed as metaphors only within contexts (if I say "here comes the sun" you will need to know whether I'm referring to a colleague or to the no-longer-overcast sky to know what I'm saying), and for religious language the "context" of metaphor frequently is that of foundational texts (i.e., the Bible). The construal of complex religious metaphors (consider "the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready" [Revelation 19:7]) requires of the reader some considerable acquaintance with Jewish and Christian uses of texts and symbols. Inevitably interest in actual religious language and philosophical problems of construal as they arise within religious texts and practice has meant a welcome convergence for philosophical, doctrinal, and biblical studies in religion, and also between concerns of analytic philosophy of religion and of philosophical hermeneutics. This is most evident in debates like those surrounding "narrative theology."



Paul Ricoeur has shown a sustained interest in religious language throughout an impressively broad philosophical career. Beginning with studies in existentialism and phenomenology, Ricoeur became interested in the role of myth, symbolism, and interpretation (his is the much-used phrase “hermeneutics of suspicion”). *The Rule of Metaphor* is concerned both with exploring the creative and world-creating powers of figurative language, but also with preserving the “ontological vehemence” involved in metaphorical speech. Intentionality (the “aboutness” of language) has since his early studies in phenomenology remained one of Ricoeur’s preoccupations. The work on metaphor and subsequently on narrative and time reflects his concern with questions of reference in the face of structuralist and later post-structuralist accounts of language which seem to cut language free from any questions of “aboutness” into a free play of signs.

Since religions are often such very *wordy* enterprises, almost anything within the remit of theology or philosophy of religion may provoke questions for the student of religious language. Let me here mention only two areas of contemporary interest, one (to return to a distinction made early on in this article) involving the “placed” language of a religion and the other the language of philosophical abstraction.

The first arises from feminist theology (see Chapter 81, Feminism). One of the strongest weapons in the arsenal of post-Christian feminists is substantially an argument about religious language – it is to say that the language of Christian scripture is ineradicably male-biased. In Christian (and other) religious texts we have a language and a symbolic system which privileges fathers and sons, and not mothers and daughters. No matter how much historical distance between reader and text, women immersing themselves in this tradition and its literature (so the post-Christian arguments go) are drinking an ideologically poisoned draft, in which male privilege and female subordination are ineluctably present. For the student of religious language the questions which arise are “how much can the symbolic language of a religion be revised or abandoned, without parting company from the religion itself? How do religious adherents read their texts as normative? What do we change if we change fundamental metaphors within a faith?” Questions of language give over, especially when informed by Derrida, Kristeva, and Lacan, to questions of symbolic order, with some feminist philosophers deeply skeptical of the extent to which any tinkering can heal what ails Christian religious language (Jantzen 1998) and others emphasizing the mobility of natural languages and symbolic systems (Soskice 2007).

The second example comes from “postmodern” philosophy, which, despite differences of emphasis, shares more concerns with analytic philosophy than is sometimes acknowledged. Recognition that we stand, as “knowers,” already placed within languages, histories, and traditions (and in that sense not as atomistic Cartesian or Kantian agents) is an insight as familiar to English-language philosophers from the writings of Wittgenstein, Iris Murdoch, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Charles Taylor (to name but a few), as from those of Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Luce Irigaray. How then do we do philosophy from within our own skins, within the “skin” of language? How can we proceed from the recognition that even our most seemingly straightforward claims are placed (consider “Columbus was the man who discovered America” in light of heightened “first nation” awareness) without collapsing into

nihilism or despair? If Nietzsche was not wrong in thinking the death of God (and transcendental value) might in the long run mean the death of Man, then could the process be reversed? If not, how is speaking possible “under the emptiness of heaven?” Theological texts are once again attracting the attention from philosophers (and not just philosophers of religion) that they deserve. Derrida has noted that for the mystic (Pseudo-Dionysius in this case), the “power of speaking and of speaking *well* of God already proceeds from God.” God cannot be addressed as an object, but only, for the mystic, invoked in prayer. “This is why apophatic discourse must also open with a prayer that recognizes ... its destination: the Other ... which is none other than its Cause” (Coward and Forshay 1992, p. 98). Derrida – agnostic – even goes so far as to consider the possibility that not only talk of God, but all “speaking” must have its assumed origin in God.

Recent years have seen a resurgence of interest in negative theology, with the work of Aquinas and Maimonides especially pertinent to religious language. Jean-Luc Marion’s *God without Being* prompted, by his accusation *ontotheology*, a vigorous defensive recovery of the theology of Being at work in Aquinas and Augustine (Te Velde 2006). If, however, God is “Being itself” and wholly unlike creatures, then serious questions are raised for religious language. What can be said of God? Maimonides reaches almost an extreme of apophaticism where all predication can be made only equivocally of God and creatures, yet this does not necessarily dictate an “antirealism.” Philosophical reflection must end in practice, and before the Godness of God one is drawn into prayer, and silence (Seeskin, 2002).

But if religious language is not, or not solely, telling us about what God “is,” since this is beyond our conceiving, then what is it for? A developing field of interest considers the way in which the form of religious texts affects the content. Good examples are found in Coleridge’s *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* or, classically, in Augustine’s *Confessions*. Both works are dialogical, addressed to silent interlocutors – the supposed and probably fictional recipient of his letters in Coleridge’s case, and God (always already there) in the case of Augustine’s *Confessions* (compare also Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*). This genre allows the reader to, as it were, eavesdrop on a conversation without pressure to take sides, but also, especially in the case of the *Confessions*, allows Augustine to display, rather than assert, what – or who – he believes God to be. It is widely recognized that many pre-modern works of theology were in this sense “performative,” and sought to lead the reader to a place of disclosure, rather than simply convey information (Candler 2006). Maimonides’ *Guide to the Perplexed* appears to be designed to work in this way, leading the reader (of words) beyond words into silence (Faur 1999). A quite different, but still performative emphasis, is to be found in the writings of the contemporary Jewish philosopher, Peter Ochs. Beginning from the work of Charles Sanders Peirce and pragmatism, Ochs wants to explore a new logic for religious understanding, and one that privileges practices – for instances the reading of scripture and traditional Jewish prayer – as a training in redemptive thinking that repairs and restores the ways we ordinarily misjudge the world. Among Christian philosophers of religion, interest in the liturgical or doxological function of religious language has been linked to a recovery of interest in the metaphysics of participation (and thus often back to Aquinas), but may as well be tied simply to the vitality of the words of scripture themselves.

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## Part V

# The Justification of Religious Belief

## Ontological Arguments

PETER VAN INWAGEN

### The History of the Argument

In his *Proslogion* (ca. 1080), St Anselm presented an argument for the conclusion that atheism – the thesis that there is in reality no “something a greater than which cannot be conceived” – is a self-contradictory position. (The relevant parts of the “historical” works cited or referred to in this article – by Anselm, Gaunilo, Thomas, Descartes, Leibniz, and Kant – can be found in Plantinga 1965.) For, Anselm argued, atheists, those who hold that such a “something” exists in the mind alone – and not in reality as well – are committed to a claim to be able to do an impossible thing: to conceive of something *greater* than something a greater than which cannot be conceived. All they would need to do to accomplish this impossible thing (if their belief that this “something” existed only in the mind were right) would be to think of that same “something” as existing in reality – for existence in reality is greater than existence in the mind alone: if  $x$  and  $y$  are alike in all respects save that  $x$  exists in reality and  $y$  exists in the mind alone, it follows that  $x$  is greater than  $y$ . Therefore, this “something” must exist, since it cannot consistently be thought of as not existing.

Anselm, it will be observed, was a sort of Meinongian: he believed that there *are* things that exist in the mind alone, and that it is possible for one to consider a thing that exists in the mind and to pose questions about it without knowing whether that thing exists in reality. Only someone who accepts something like a Meinongian ontology, therefore, can accept Anselm’s argument. And Meinongians have generally rejected the argument. Meinong himself contended that the phrase “the golden mountain that exists (in reality)” denotes an object that does *not* exist (in reality). And – supposing him to have been willing to adopt Anselm’s terminology – he would have said if a something a greater than which cannot be conceived exists in the mind alone (and if existence in reality is greater than existence in the mind alone, as Anselm supposed), then “a something than which no greater can be conceived” denotes an object that is less great than it would be if it existed in reality (see Marek 2008.)

Anselm’s argument was immediately attacked by the monk Gaunilo, who maintained that Anselm’s reasoning, if it were valid, could be used not only to prove the existence in reality of a “something *simpliciter*” a greater than which could not be conceived, but, for any kind, to prove the existence in reality of a “something *of that kind*”



a greater than which *of that kind* could not be conceived – an island a greater island than which could not be conceived, for example. Anselm wrote a lengthy reply to Gaunilo, but many of the crucial points in his reply are very hard to understand, and this is particularly true of his response to the “island” difficulty. About 200 years later, St Thomas Aquinas presented a refutation of Anselm’s argument, but his refutation seems to be based on a misunderstanding of the argument, and it is in fact unlikely that he actually had access to the text of *Proslogion*. Nevertheless, the authority of Thomas was so great that his refutation of the argument became more or less standard in Catholic philosophy. It is therefore possible that the argument for the existence of God in Descartes’ Fifth Meditation was influenced by Anselm’s argument: Descartes may have encountered Thomas’ statement of Anselm’s argument in the lectures of his Jesuit schoolmasters.

The argument of the Fifth Meditation proceeds as follows. We begin with the concept of a supremely perfect being, that is, a being that possesses every perfection. [Cf. Anselm’s “something a greater than which cannot be conceived.”] But existence [Anselm’s “existence in reality”] is a perfection. [Cf. Anselm: “Existence in reality is greater than existence in the mind alone.”] Therefore, just as shape is a part of the concept of a body, existence is a part of the concept of a perfect being (we shall hereafter omit the qualification “supremely”): just as one cannot conceive of a body that lacks a shape, one cannot conceive of a perfect being that lacks existence. Therefore, a perfect being exists (see also Chapter 25, Perfect Being Theology).

Kant named this argument “the ontological argument,” and claimed to have refuted it. (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A592 = B620 – A602 = B630.) He in fact presented two refutations of the argument, which he wrongly regarded as alternative statements of the same refutation. One of these refutations, the weaker of the two (the refutation that turns on the slogan, “Being is a logical, not a real predicate”) immediately became the standard textbook “refutation of the ontological argument” and remained so for 200 years. The remainder of this paragraph is a statement of the other refutation – the one that *should* have become the textbook refutation of the argument (A595 = B623 – A596 = B624). Let us grant that Descartes’ argument establishes that the idea of a perfect being that does not exist is an inconsistent idea (just as the idea of a body that has no shape is an inconsistent idea); from this it does not follow that a perfect being *exists*. That this does not follow is easy to see, for the idea of an X that does not exist is an inconsistent idea, no matter what X may be. The idea of a non-existent unicorn, for example, is an inconsistent idea, for nothing could possibly be a non-existent unicorn. But that fact does not entail that there are unicorns, and neither does the fact that “non-existent perfect being” is an inconsistent idea entail that there is a perfect being. If Kant is right – and what he says is very plausible – Descartes’ argument is logically invalid. (Kant’s refutation of Descartes’ argument is not applicable to Anselm’s argument, owing to Anselm’s quasi-Meinongian distinction between existence in reality and existence in the mind. To see this, suppose that Anselm had been invited to consider the following adaptation of Kant’s refutation of the Cartesian argument to his own argument: “Your argument assumes that if the idea of an X that does not exist in reality is a self-contradictory idea, then an X exists in reality. But this assumption is wrong: the idea of a unicorn that does not exist in reality is self-contradictory, and no unicorns exist in reality.” Anselm would have agreed that his

argument rested on this assumption, but would have insisted that the idea of a unicorn that does not exist in reality was *not* a self-contradictory idea – since unicorns that do not exist in reality do exist in the minds of various people. And he would also have insisted that the idea of a something a greater than which cannot be conceived that does not exist in reality *is* a self-contradictory idea.)

## The Modal Ontological Argument

Although Descartes' argument is invalid, there is an argument – the so-called modal ontological argument – that can be expressed in words very similar to those of Descartes' argument and is indisputably logically valid. The most precise version of the modal argument is due to Alvin Plantinga (1974, ch. 10). Some recent commentators claim to have found *two* versions of the ontological argument in Anselm's *Proslogion*, the argument discussed above and another (Malcolm 1960; Hartshorne 1962). It is interesting to note that the modal argument is in many ways very similar to the "second" argument these commentators ascribe to Anselm.

We may state the modal argument as follows. Say that a property is *essential* to a thing  $x$  if  $x$  could not exist without having it – if  $x$ 's existing without that property is an intrinsically or metaphysically impossible state of affairs. It seems evident that not all the properties of a thing can be essential to it. (Properties of a thing that are not essential to it are said to be "accidental" to it.) The property "being a philosopher," for example, is not essential to Descartes, since he might have died in infancy. Because a property of an object may belong to that object only accidentally, it is plausible to suppose that Descartes was wrong to define a perfect being as a being that possesses every perfection. He should, rather, have defined a perfect being as a being that possesses every perfection *essentially*. Suppose, for example, that wisdom is a perfection. We should not want to count a being as perfect if, although it was wise as things stood, it *might have been* foolish: a perfect being must be one that is not only wise but one whose very nature is inseparable from wisdom. It is, moreover, implausible to suppose, as Descartes did, that existence is a perfection, for existence necessarily belongs to everything and is therefore consistent with any possible degree of imperfection. But it is not at all implausible to suppose that *necessary* existence is a perfection, for if a thing's non-existence is impossible, then the fact that it exists is a consequence of its nature alone, and is entirely independent of the actions of other beings and the accidents of history.

If we define a perfect being as a being that possesses every perfection essentially, and if we suppose that necessary existence is a perfection, the existence of a perfect being follows from a single premise: that a perfect being (so defined) is possible. (That is, that a perfect being is not intrinsically impossible, in the sense in which a round square or shapeless body is intrinsically impossible.) Or, at any rate, this conclusion follows given the set of rules for reasoning about possibility and necessity that logicians call "S5." There are weaker sets of rules on which this conclusion does not follow, but most philosophers and logicians regard it as at least extremely plausible to suppose that S5 comprises the correct set of rules for reasoning about possibility and necessity (in the sense of these terms that figures in the modal ontological argument). We shall show

that the existence of a perfect being follows from its possibility by an argument couched in terms of “possible worlds.” The way we speak about the relations between possible worlds will, in effect, presuppose S5.

If a perfect being is possible, then a perfect being exists in some possible world. If a perfect being exists in some possible world, then in that world it is not only existent but necessarily existent – necessary existence being a perfection. Necessary existence, however, is the same thing as existence in all possible worlds. A being that exists necessarily in some possible world *w*, must, therefore, exist in this, the actual world – for if that being did not exist in this world, it would not be *necessarily* existent in *w*; that is, it would not be true in *w* that it existed in every possible world. This being, moreover, must not only exist in this world, but must have all perfections in this world – for if it lacked some perfection in this world, it would not have that perfection *essentially* in *w*. If, for example, wisdom is a perfection, a being that is wise in *w* and is unwise in this world would not be *essentially* wise in *w*. If, therefore, there is a possible world *w* in which there is a being that has all perfections essentially (necessary existence being one of the perfections) – that is to say, if a perfect being is possible – there must *actually* be a being that has all perfections. It is not difficult to show, by extending this line of reasoning, that this being must not only actually exist and actually have all perfections, but that it must actually be *necessarily* existent and actually have all perfections *essentially*. (For a rigorous proof of the validity of the modal argument – a proof in which no steps are omitted – see van Inwagen 2007.) In sum, if it is possible for a perfect being to exist, a perfect being does exist.

### The Possibility of a Perfect Being: Leibniz

But what about the antecedent of this conditional? Is it true? Is it so much as possible for a perfect being to exist? Is “perfect being” a possible concept? (See Chapter 55, Theism and Incoherence; and Chapter 57, The Problem of no Best World.) Such questions, questions concerning the possibility of concepts remote from the concerns of everyday life, are not easy to answer. One way to see why this is so is to reflect on the fact that for any such concept, it is possible to find a second concept so related to that concept that it is demonstrable that exactly one of the two concepts is possible – and, in many such cases, neither of the two will bear any obvious mark either of possibility or of impossibility. This is certainly the case with the concept of a perfect being. For consider the concept of a “correct atheist,” the concept, that is, of someone who denies that there is a perfect being and who is right in denying this. If the concept “correct atheist” is a possible concept, the concept “perfect being” is an impossible concept. (For if “correct atheist” is a possible concept, then in some possible world there is a correct atheist and hence no perfect being. But if “perfect being” is a possible concept – the modal argument shows – there is no world in which there is no perfect being.) And if “perfect being” is an impossible concept, “correct atheist” is obviously a possible concept, since in that case there *are* correct atheists. One of these two concepts is therefore possible and the other impossible.

But which is which? It seems that if the modal argument is to be convincing, it will have to be supplemented by a convincing *a priori* argument for the possibility of a

perfect being. Leibniz was probably the first philosopher to be aware of this, and he did offer such an argument. A second argument for this conclusion is due to Kurt Gödel. There have been no others.

Leibniz's argument proceeds from the premise that every property is either a "simple, positive" property or a "complex" property (roughly, a "truth-functional combination" of simple, positive properties). If two properties are mutually inconsistent, Leibniz argues, at least one of the two must be complex. (For example, if  $F$  and  $G$  are simple, positive properties,  $F$  is inconsistent with "not- $F$ ," and " $F$  or  $G$ " is inconsistent with "not- $F$  and not- $G$ ." It is *only* in this way that properties can be inconsistent with each other.) All perfections are simple, positive properties. Hence, any two perfections are consistent with each other, and the concept of a being that has all perfections is a consistent concept.

It will be noted that even if this argument is unobjectionable, it does not show that the premise of the *modal* argument is true. An additional premise would be required to establish that conclusion: "If  $F$  is a perfection, so is 'being essentially  $F$ ,'" perhaps, or "If  $F$  is a perfection, then for some  $G$ ,  $F$  is the property of having  $G$  essentially." And it is difficult to see how properties like, e.g., "being essentially wise" or "being essentially omnipotent" could be "simple" properties. In any case, the argument is *not* unobjectionable. Although the *names* of properties can be, in an obvious sense, positive or negative, it is not at all evident that properties themselves can meaningfully be said to be positive or negative. Consider, for example, the property names "being self-existent" and "not depending for its existence on another." Many philosophers and theologians have said that these are two names for one property. Suppose they are right. Is that one property positive or negative? (A similar point applies to "simple" and "having no parts.")

## The Possibility of a Perfect Being: Gödel

We turn to Gödel's argument for the possibility of a perfect being. (The argument is presented in a note that was not published till after Gödel's death; see Gödel 1995. The argument that follows in the text is a very free paraphrase of Gödel's argument.) Call the property of being a perfect being "perfection." Define a *positive* property as a property that has no morally or aesthetically negative aspect. (Gödel's employment of the term "positive" was apparently intended as a sort of allusion to Leibniz's argument, but he uses the word in an entirely different sense.) Say that a property  $x$  *entails* a property  $y$  if it is (intrinsically or metaphysically) impossible for something that has  $x$  to lack  $y$ .

The argument has three premises:

- (1) Not all properties are positive.
- (2) Perfection is a positive property.
- (3) If  $x$  is a positive property and  $x$  entails  $y$ ,  $y$  is a positive property.

It follows from (1), (2), and (3) that perfection is a possible property. (*Proof:* Suppose perfection is impossible. Then perfection entails all properties. But then, by (2) and (3), all properties are positive, which contradicts (1).)

It seems evident that there *are* properties that have a morally or aesthetically negative aspect: Being evil, for example, or being deformed. Premise (1) seems therefore to be true. It is plausible to suppose that perfection has no morally or aesthetically negative aspect. It is therefore plausible to suppose that premise (2) is true.

But what about premise (3) – sometimes called Gödel's principle? Should we accept it? A straightforward answer to this question is hard to come by, but we can do this much: we can show that a dilemma confronts anyone who accepts both premise (1) ("Not all properties are positive") and premise (3) (Gödel's principle). If, therefore, premise (1) is granted, this dilemma will confront anyone who accepts Gödel's principle. The dilemma may be stated as follows.

Consider these two properties:

Having constructed a time machine.

Having proved that a time machine is (intrinsically or metaphysically) impossible.

It is obvious that at least one of these two properties is impossible. If, in some possible world, something, some physicist perhaps, has either, it follows (in S5) that nothing has the other in any possible world. Both properties may for all we know be impossible (for all we know, time machines are impossible *and* it's impossible to prove this), but they certainly can't both be possible.

We note that both properties *seem* positive: when we hold them before our minds, we see no morally or aesthetically negative aspect in either. The second premise of each of the following two (valid) arguments therefore *seems* to be true.

Not all properties are positive;

"having constructed a time machine" is a positive property;

if  $x$  is a positive property and  $x$  entails  $y$ ,  $y$  is a positive property;

hence, "having constructed a time machine" is a possible property.

Not all properties are positive;

"having proved that a time machine is impossible" is a positive property;

if  $x$  is a positive property and  $x$  entails  $y$ ,  $y$  is a positive property;

hence, "having proved that a time machine is impossible" is a possible property.

But we know that at least one of these two properties is impossible. So at least one of the two arguments has a false premise.

We must conclude, therefore, that either Gödel's principle is false or all properties are positive (which certainly seems to be false), or there are properties we can carefully consider and not see any negative aspect in and which nevertheless have one – that is, there are properties that appear to us to be positive and aren't. And if there are properties that appear to us to be positive and aren't, how can we be sure, what reason have we to suppose, that perfection is a positive property?

If we insist that not all properties are positive, therefore, and if we insist that we can determine whether a property is possible "by inspection," we can only conclude that Gödel's principle is false. Reflection on the "time machine" dilemma, therefore, demonstrates that Gödel's argument for the possibility of a perfect being does not demonstrate its conclusion. There is, in fact, no known *a priori* argument – no argument that, like

Leibniz's argument and Gödel's argument, proceeds from first principles – for the possibility of a perfect being that can be said to demonstrate its conclusion.

## The Rationality of Belief in a Perfect Being: Plantinga

Alvin Plantinga has conceded that no known *a priori* argument for the possibility of a perfect being demonstrates its conclusion, and that the modal argument therefore cannot serve as a means by which one can pass from not knowing whether there is a perfect being to knowing that there is a perfect being. He has, however, contended that the modal argument demonstrates that it *can be rational* to believe that a perfect being exists – since it can be rational to believe that a perfect being is possible (Plantinga 1974, pp. 220–1). The plausibility of this contention obviously depends on the following principle, or something very like it: If it can be rational to believe that *p*, and if it is demonstrable that *p* entails *q*, then it can be rational to believe that *q*. Let us call this the rationality principle (RP). Before we examine RP, let us ask why Plantinga holds that it can be rational to believe that a perfect being is possible.

Plantinga points out that there are lots of respectable, widely held philosophical positions for which there is no argument that is accepted by all (or even by most) competent philosophers. (One might cite the neo-Meinongian thesis that there are objects that do not exist, the thesis that there cannot be a private language, and the thesis that the rightness or wrongness of an act is solely a function of its consequences.) That a perfect being is possible is, Plantinga contends, one of these respectable, widely held philosophical positions. Many philosophers accept it, and various important philosophers have attempted to show that it is false – Sartre, for example (“Such a being would be an impossible amalgam of ‘being-in-itself’ and ‘being-for-itself’”) and J. N. Findlay (“A perfect being must be necessarily existent, and if there is a necessarily existent being, there are necessarily true existential propositions, which is impossible”) (see Findlay 1948). And, Plantinga further contends, any respectable, widely held philosophical position is one that it can be rational for a philosopher to hold, even if there is no argument for that position that is accepted by all or most competent philosophers. His argument is *ad hominem*: philosophers had *better* believe this; philosophers who do not – and who do not wish to affirm theses that they themselves say cannot be rationally affirmed – will find themselves “with a pretty slim and pretty dull philosophy.”

Let us not dispute this conclusion; let us stipulate that it can be rational to believe that a perfect being is possible. Does it follow that (given the validity of the modal argument) it can be rational to believe that there is a perfect being? The right answer to this question obviously depends on whether RP is true. And it would seem that it is not – not if it is true that any respectable philosophical position is a position that it can be rational to hold. A simple example shows this.

That there are universals is obviously a respectable, widely held philosophical position. Therefore, if Plantinga is right, it can be rational to believe that there are universals. Let us suppose that this possibility is realized: a certain philosopher, Alice, does believe that there are universals and this belief of hers is rational. Now suppose that someone presents Alice with a demonstration of both these propositions: every universal occupies some region of space; no universal occupies any region of space (note that



these two propositions are not logically inconsistent, and that there is therefore no logical barrier to there being a demonstration of each). Would it then be reasonable for Alice to believe that something both occupies some region of space and does not occupy any region of space? Obviously not: no one can rationally believe an obvious and straightforward contradiction. It is obvious that what Alice ought to do, in the situation in which she finds herself, is to withdraw her assent to "There are universals" – and in fact to assent to "There are no universals." And we therefore have a counterexample to RP: it is true that it can be rational to believe that there are universals (this is shown by example: Alice rationally believed that there were universals before she was aware of the demonstration that their existence implied a contradiction); it is demonstrable that the existence of universals implies a certain contradiction; it cannot be rational to believe that contradiction. The general lesson of the counterexample is this: It may (a) be true that someone can rationally believe that  $p$ , and (b) demonstrable that  $p$  entails  $q$ , and (c) *false* that anyone can rationally believe that  $q$  – because no one can rationally believe that  $q$  and one can rationally believe that  $p$  only if one is unaware that it is demonstrable that  $p$  entails  $q$ . For all Plantinga has said, therefore, it may be that, although it can be rational to believe that a perfect being is possible and demonstrable that the possibility of a perfect being entails the existence of a perfect being, it cannot be rational to believe in the existence of a perfect being – since it cannot be rational to believe in the existence of a perfect being and it can be rational for one to believe that a perfect being is possible only if one is unaware that the possibility of a perfect being entails the existence of a perfect being.

Plantinga's argument is therefore unconvincing. But even if the argument were convincing, even if it were wholly unobjectionable, it is not easy to see why it would be *necessary*. If one believes, as Plantinga does, that any respectable, widely held philosophical position is one that it can be rational to hold, why should one not apply this thesis "directly" to "A perfect being exists"? Why need one bother with an argument that appeals to "A perfect being is possible" and the modal argument and RP? "A perfect being exists," after all, is a thesis that has been affirmed by many respectable philosophers. If, moreover, one does for some reason think that an argument for the conclusion that it can be reasonable to believe that a perfect being exists that appeals to RP is preferable to one that does not, one will find it easy to construct "RP" arguments that appeal to entailments that can be demonstrated by reasoning much simpler than the reasoning contained in the modal argument. For example: "It can be rational to believe that some material thing has been created by a perfect being; 'Some material thing has been created by a perfect being' demonstrably entails 'There is a perfect being'; therefore, it can be rational to believe that there is a perfect being."

## Summary

The Anselmian ontological argument presupposes the quasi-Meinongian thesis that "things that exist in the mind alone" are in some sense "there" and can stand in certain relations – the relation " $x$  is a thing that is less great than  $y$ ," for example – to things that "exist in reality." It is therefore no more plausible than that thesis. (Meinongians, moreover, have generally rejected the argument.)



The Cartesian ontological argument was refuted by Kant – although not in the way most philosophers have supposed.

The modal argument contains no logical flaw, but it depends on a premise – the possibility of a perfect being – that is logically equivalent to its conclusion, is no more plausible than that conclusion, and cannot be demonstrated.

Plantinga's contention that the validity of the modal argument demonstrates that belief in a perfect being is rational is unconvincing.

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## Cosmological Arguments

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Within philosophy of religion, a cosmological argument is understood to be an argument from the existence of the world to the existence of God. Typically, such arguments proceed in two steps. The first step argues from the existence of the world to the existence of a first cause or necessary being that accounts for the existence of the world (see Chapter 33, Necessity). The second step argues that such a first cause or necessary being has, or would very likely have, the properties associated with the idea of God. Cosmological arguments appeared in Plato and Aristotle, played a prominent role in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic thought during the medieval period, and were forcefully presented in the eighteenth century by Gottfried Leibniz and Samuel Clarke. In the modern period these arguments, particularly as presented by Thomas Aquinas, Leibniz, and Clarke, have been severely criticized by David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and others. In the last few decades of the twentieth century, however, there was a revival of interest in cosmological arguments, and several challenges to the major criticisms of these arguments have appeared.

Cosmological arguments may be divided into two broad types: those that depend on a premise denying an infinite regress of causes and those that do not depend on such a premise. Among the former are contained the first “three ways” presented by Aquinas, as well as an interesting argument, developed by Islamic thinkers, that the world cannot be infinitely old and, therefore, must have come into existence by the creative will of God (see Chapter 9, *The Christian Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology*; and Chapter 10, *The Islamic Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology*). An important difference between the arguments represented by Aquinas’s first “three ways” and the Islamic argument is that while both reject an infinite regress of causes, only the latter bases the objection on the alleged impossibility of an infinite *temporal* regress. Unlike Bonaventure, who adopted the Islamic argument, Aquinas did not think that philosophy could show that the world had a temporal beginning. He rejected an infinite regress of essentially ordered causes (a *non-temporal* causal series), identifying God as the first cause in such a non-temporal series. Leibniz and Clarke, however, allowed an infinite regress of causes, arguing only that there must be a sufficient reason for the existence of such a series of causes. Thus the eighteenth-century arguments of Clarke and Leibniz do not depend on rejecting an infinite regress of causes. Appealing to the principle of sufficient reason, Clarke and Leibniz insist only that such a series could not be self-explanatory and, therefore, would require an explanation in

the causal activity of some being outside the series (see Chapter 12, Early Modern Philosophical Theology on the Continent; and Chapter 13, Early Modern Philosophical Theology in Great Britain).

Cosmological arguments relying on philosophical objections to an infinite temporal series of causes typically proceed as follows:

- (1) Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
- (2) The world began to exist.
- (3) Therefore, the world has a cause of its existence.

The philosophical argument for premise (2) is based on the alleged impossibility of an infinite series of past events. Why is such a series thought to be impossible? If we begin with some present event and consider further events proceeding endlessly into the future, such a series is *potentially infinite*. For at any future event in the series there will have actually occurred only a finite number of events between that event and the present event. But if we think of events receding endlessly into the past from the present, we would be thinking of an infinite series that has actually occurred, a series that is *actually infinite*. The claim is that while a series of events can be potentially infinite, it cannot be actually infinite. So, the world could not have always existed.

It must be admitted that it is difficult to imagine an absolutely infinite number of temporally discrete events having already occurred. But what is the philosophical objection to it? It is sometimes suggested that if the series of events prior to the present is actually infinite, then there must be events in the past that are separated from the present by an infinite number of events. However, this suggestion is mistaken. No past event is separated from the present by an infinite number of events. It is also sometimes suggested that if the past is actually infinite then new events cannot be *added* to the series, for the series thus added to would be the same size as the series before the addition was made. The response to this objection is that one can add to an infinite collection even though the number of entities in the collection before the addition will be the same as the number of entities in the collection after the addition. The fact that this is so does not prevent the old collection from being a proper subset of the collection composed of the old collection and the new member. For reasons such as these, most philosophers who have studied these matters remain unconvinced that an actual infinite series of past events is impossible.

In addition to the philosophical argument against the possibility that the world has always existed, some proponents endeavor to support premise (2) by appealing to scientific theories that imply that the world had a beginning. For example, they appeal to the big bang theory according to which the universe probably began to exist some 14 billion years ago. There is a growing body of literature that endeavors to assess the implications of such theories for this particular cosmological argument.

A good example of a cosmological argument based on a rejection of a *non-temporal* infinite regress of causes is Aquinas' second way. This argument may be summarized as follows:

- (1) Some things exist and their existence is caused.
- (2) Whatever is caused to exist is caused to exist by something else.

- (3) An infinite regress of (non-temporal) causes resulting in the existence of anything is impossible.
- (4) Therefore, there is a first cause of existence.

There are two major difficulties in assessing the third premise of this argument. First, there is the difficulty of understanding exactly what a non-temporal causal series is. Second, there is the difficulty of determining exactly why such a series cannot proceed to infinity. To resolve the first difficulty we must distinguish the *earlier* cause that brought some presently existing object into existence from whatever *presently existing* things are causally responsible for its existence at this very moment. The basic idea is that if *A* (a human being, say) now exists, *A* is right now being caused to exist by something else *B*, which may itself be simultaneously caused by *C* to be causing *A* to exist. Although *A* would not exist now had it not been brought into existence by something else that existed temporally prior to *A* (a temporal causal series), it is also true, so Aquinas thought, that *A* would not now exist were it not now being caused to exist by something else *B* (a non-temporal causal series). In such a non-temporal series of causes of *A*'s present existence, Aquinas held that the cause of any member in the series either is the first cause in the series or is itself being caused to cause that member by some non-temporally prior cause in the series.

Although Aquinas allowed that it is theoretically possible for a temporal series of causes to proceed backwards to infinity, he thought it obvious that a non-temporal causal series must terminate in a first member, itself uncaused. Why is this supposed to be obvious? Presumably, the idea is that it is obvious that if *B* is right now causing *A* to exist, and *C* is right now causing *B* to be causing *A* to exist, then if *C* and every prior member in the series were to have the same status as *B*, no causing would be occurring at all. Or, to put it differently, if there were no first cause in this series it would be simply inexplicable that such a series of causings is actually occurring. But once the argument is put in this fashion it invites the skeptical challenge that the fact that such causing goes on may simply be inexplicable. Thus, understanding the third premise of this argument and determining exactly why it must be true has proved to be difficult. And, of course, it would be question-begging to simply *define* a non-temporal causal series as one that terminates in a first cause. As a result, many philosophers find the argument unconvincing.

As noted above, the cosmological arguments developed by Leibniz and Clarke do not depend on a premise that rejects an infinite regress of causes. What they do depend on is a rather strong explanatory principle according to which there must be a determining reason for the existence of any being whatever. If we think of a *dependent being* as a being whose determining reason lies in the causal activity of other beings, and think of a *self-existent being* as a being whose determining reason lies within its own nature, the first step of Clarke's cosmological argument can be put as follows.

- (1) Every being (that exists or ever did exist) is either a dependent being or a self-existent being.
- (2) Not every being can be a dependent being.
- (3) Therefore, there exists a self-existent being.

While the principle that there must be a determining reason for the existence of any being whatever immediately yields premise (1), it is difficult to see how it establishes premise (2). For if we allow for an infinite regress of dependent beings, each having the reason for its existence in some preceding member of the series, it is difficult to see how any being exists that lacks a reason for or explanation of its existence. Of course, if we view the infinite series of dependent beings as itself a dependent being, we might argue that unless there is a self-existent being there would be no determining reason for the existence of the series itself. But it does not seem right to view the succession or series of dependent beings as still another dependent being. So, as strong as the principle we are considering appears to be, it does not appear to be strong enough to do away with the supposition that every being that exists or ever did exist is a dependent being. To carry out this task the cosmological arguments of Clarke and Leibniz required a stronger principle, the principle of sufficient reason (PSR).

The explanatory principle we have been considering is restricted to requiring an explanation for the existence of individual beings. PSR is a principle concerning facts, including facts consisting in the existence of individual beings. But PSR also requires an explanation for facts about individual beings, for example, the fact that John is happy. In addition, PSR requires an explanation for general facts such as the fact that someone is happy or the fact that there are dependent beings. Leibniz expresses PSR as the principle "that no fact can be real or existent, no statement true, unless there be a sufficient reason why it is so and not otherwise" (Leibniz 1951 [1714], para. 32). And Clarke asserts: "Undoubtedly nothing is, without a sufficient reason why it is, rather than not; and why it is thus, rather than otherwise" (Clarke and Leibniz 1956 [1717], third reply).

If we understand a contingent fact to be a fact that possibly might not have been a fact at all, it is clear that Leibniz held that every contingent fact has a sufficient reason or explanation. And so long as we restrict ourselves to contingent facts concerning the existence of things, it is clear that Clarke held that all such facts must have a sufficient reason. If either view should be correct, it does seem that Clarke's premise (2) must be true. For if every being were dependent, it does seem that there would be a contingent fact without any explanation – the fact that there are dependent beings. If PSR is true, the fact that there are dependent beings must have an explanation or sufficient reason. So, given Clarke's convictions about PSR, it is understandable why he should hold that not every being can be a dependent being. For if every being that exists or ever did exist is a dependent being, what could possibly be the sufficient reason for the fact that there are dependent beings? It won't do to point to some particular dependent being and observe that it produced other dependent beings. The question why there are any dependent beings cannot be answered by appealing to the causal activity of some particular dependent being any more than the question why there are any human beings can be answered by appealing to Adam and Eve and their causal activity in producing other human beings. Nor will it do to observe that there always have been dependent beings engaged in causing other dependent beings. The question why there are any dependent beings cannot be answered by noting that there always have been dependent beings any more than the question why there are any elephants can be answered simply by observing that there always have been elephants. To note that there always

have been elephants may explain how long elephants have been in existence, but it won't explain why there are elephants at all.

Should we conclude that Clarke's cosmological argument is sound? Not quite. For all we have seen is that his argument is sound *if* PSR is true. But what of PSR itself? Is it true? In its unrestricted form PSR holds that every fact has an explanation; in its restricted form it holds that every contingent fact has an explanation. Even if we take PSR in its restricted form, there are serious objections to it.

An explanation of one fact in terms of another fact that is a *sufficient reason* for it would be one in which the explaining fact *entails* the fact it explains. One objection to PSR is that it cannot avoid the dark night of Spinozism, a night in which all facts appear to be necessary. This difficulty was particularly acute for Leibniz. He explained God's creation of this world by this world's being the best and God's choosing to create the best. But what accounts for God's choosing to create the best, rather than some inferior world or none at all? God chooses the best because of his absolute perfection – being absolutely perfect he naturally chooses to create the best. The difficulty is that God's being perfect is, for Leibniz, a necessary fact. It seems, then, that God's choice to create the best must also be necessary and, consequently, the existence of this world is necessary. If we avoid this conclusion by saying that God's being perfect is not the sufficient reason of his choice to create the best we run into an infinite regress of explanations of his choice to create the best. For suppose we say that it is God's perfection in conjunction with his choice to exercise his goodness that constitutes the sufficient reason for his choice to create the best. What then of his choice to exercise his goodness? A similar problem would arise in providing a sufficient reason for it. And we seem to be off to the races, each reason determining a choice only by virtue of a prior choice to act in accordance with that reason.

A second and more serious objection to the restricted form of PSR is that it appears to be impossible for every contingent fact to have an explanation. Consider the huge conjunctive fact whose conjuncts are all the other contingent facts that there are. This huge conjunctive fact must itself be a contingent fact, otherwise its conjuncts would not be contingent. Now what can be the sufficient reason for this huge conjunctive fact? It cannot be some necessary fact. For the sufficient reason for a fact is another fact that entails it; and whatever is entailed by a necessary fact is itself necessary. The huge conjunctive fact cannot be its own sufficient reason since only a necessary fact could be self-explanatory. So, the sufficient reason for the huge conjunctive fact would have to be one of the contingent facts that is a conjunct of it. But then that conjunct would have to be a sufficient reason for itself, since whatever is a sufficient reason for a conjunctive fact must be a sufficient reason for each of its conjuncts. It follows, then, that the huge conjunctive fact cannot have an explanation. It thus appears that PSR is false.

In the above argument it is important not to confuse the huge conjunctive fact constituted by every other contingent fact with the general fact that there are contingent facts. The latter fact – that there are contingent facts – is not itself a contingent fact. It is a necessary fact. For every possible world contains some contingent fact or other. Consider the contingent fact that there are elephants. That there are elephants is a fact in the actual world. But if some possible world in which there are no elephants were to be actual, it would be a fact that there are no elephants. So, no matter what possible world is actual, either that there are elephants will be a fact or that there are



no elephants will be a fact. Thus, that there are contingent facts is itself a necessary fact. But the huge conjunctive fact described above is itself a contingent fact. Had some other possible world been actual, the huge conjunctive fact described above would not have been a fact.

Our conclusion concerning the eighteenth-century argument developed by Clarke is that its second premise – not every being can be a dependent being – has not been proved to be true. As opposed to Hume and many modern critics, we have defended Clarke's view that if every being were dependent there would be a fact – that there are dependent beings – that would lack a sufficient reason. But since PSR is the only reason given to reject the idea that every being could be dependent, and since PSR, even in its restricted form, is open to serious objections, we must conclude that the second premise of Clarke's argument has not been established. This does not mean that his argument is unsound. It only means that it has not been shown to be sound and, therefore, fails as a proof of the existence of a self-existing being.

As we noted at the outset, cosmological arguments involve two steps: proving that there exists a first cause or self-existent (necessary) being, and proving that such a being would possess the properties commonly associated with God – infinite power, wisdom, and goodness (see Chapter 27, Omnipotence; Chapter 28, Omniscience; and Chapter 30, Goodness). Since philosophers have been mainly concerned with assessing the first step, we have focused our attention on it. It is important to recognize, however, that even if some argument for the first step should be entirely successful, there remains the difficult task of establishing that the first cause or self-existent being is God (see Chapter 49, Cumulative Cases).

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## Teleological and Design Arguments

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Teleological arguments make a case for the existence of God based on examples of apparent design or purposiveness in the natural world. These arguments are normally inductive in nature, taking as their starting point features of the world difficult to explain within a purely naturalistic model. Design arguments have appealed to such general features of the universe as its beauty, its orderly or law-like operations, the interconnectedness of its parts, and its intelligibility; or to more specific features such as its suitability for life, its providing the right conditions for moral growth, or its including conscious beings. Many find this evidential approach to the existence of God more persuasive than the ontological or cosmological arguments (see Chapter 42, Ontological Arguments; and Chapter 43, Cosmological Arguments); it appeals to concrete instances of order common to our experience, so that few are inclined to dispute the premises. Instead, discussion revolves around whether or not the examples of apparent design in nature are caused by an intelligent being or can be explained in some other way (e.g., by natural selection) or are simply a matter of chance.

### Traditional Analogical Arguments

Early versions of the argument from design took the form of an *analogy* between human productions and the universe as a whole. Writing at the end of the eighteenth century, the English philosopher and theologian William Paley famously compared the universe to a watch, noting that “the contrivances of nature ... are not less evidently mechanical, not less evidently contrivances, not less evidently accommodated to their end or suited to their office than are the most perfect productions of human ingenuity” (Paley 1972 [1802], p. 14). Since Paley’s examples of apparent purpose in nature, or means adapted to ends, were largely drawn from the biological realm (he was especially impressed with the human eye), they became less convincing after the advent of evolutionary theory. Darwin’s theory provided an explanation of the adaptation of organisms to their environments and of organic parts to their functions that required no appeal to a designing intelligence or orderer. Purely random mutations and the process of natural selection might produce these same results, so a theistic explanation of the data, while possible, is not required to explain them. Darwin’s theory also undermines Paley’s analogy

between human artifacts, such as a watch, and natural, living organisms. Watches contain no internal principles of adaptation or variation, while organisms do (see Chapter 64, Theism and Evolutionary Biology).

Some defenders of the design argument respond to this criticism by viewing the entire evolutionary process as another instance of nature operating to achieve an end, since it results in organisms of increasing complexity and capacity. Richard Swinburne suggests that the theory of evolution shows the natural universe to be “a machine-making machine” (1979, p. 135). Alternatively, one might shift from the organic realm to focus on the motions of the planets in the solar system or the process of crystal formation or the way in which the universe as a whole has evolved to make life possible. Formulated as an analogical argument, one would start with similarities or *initial likenesses* between the two items (e.g., the planetary system and a clock) and conclude that they will probably be similar in a further respect as well, the *terminal likeness*. Analogical arguments are strongest when (a) there are few or no instances where the initial likenesses are found *without* the terminal likeness (so that the initial likenesses seem clearly relevant to the terminal likeness) and (b) the items being compared have few major *dissimilarities*.

The most notorious critic of the design argument, David Hume, focused especially on (b), finding many differences between products of human design and the universe as a whole – for example, the uniqueness of the universe, the epistemic inaccessibility of its origins, its apparent flaws or defects, and so on (see Hume 1980 [1779]). Those defending the analogical approach seek to minimize these differences or to show their irrelevance to the conclusion. Recently some have proposed that a better analogy might be between the universe and a work of art, rather than between the universe and a machine, since this would allow a greater appeal to the beauty of the universe and would avoid some of Hume’s criticisms about the unsuitability of the universe for certain human purposes. It would also serve to blunt the objection that an intelligent and all-powerful being would not use a mechanism as inefficient as the evolutionary process to produce the universe. Works of art, especially those of narrative form, are evaluated by very different criteria than mechanical efficiency. Swinburne’s reflections on what God’s purposes might be in creating free, personal, embodied agents also undercut some of Hume’s complaints about the unsuitability of the universe as a place for human flourishing. Similar points about the kind of universe most conducive to personal and moral growth appear in the work of F. R. Tennant (1930) and John Hick (1981).

### Arguments to the Best Explanation

Most current versions of the design argument proceed not in terms of analogies between the universe and human artifacts, but as arguments to the best explanation of the data of our experience. They claim that the theistic hypothesis of an intelligent designer is a superior explanation of this data than is the naturalistic hypothesis that the features of the universe are due to the operation of blind natural forces. One advantage of the explanatory model of argumentation is that it allows for a cumulative case to be made in favor of the theistic hypothesis; distinct and apparently unrelated aspects of the

universe can be presented as evidence of intelligent purpose (see Chapter 49, Cumulative Cases). An important example of the cumulative case approach can be found in the work of F. R. Tennant early in the twentieth century. Tennant appealed especially to the fitness of the earth as a home for living and conscious beings, including the adjustment of the many physical variables required to make life possible. But he also emphasized the rational structure and intelligibility of the universe, its suitability as an arena for moral development, and its being “saturated with beauty” at every level, from the microscopic to the macroscopic (see Tennant 1930, vol. 2, ch. 4).

This approach finds greater precision in the recent work of Richard Swinburne (2004). Swinburne’s cumulative case for God’s existence is an argument to the best explanation, citing various pieces of data or evidence that are (a) relatively improbable on an assumption that theism is false, but (b) relatively probable if theism is true. One such datum is that our universe exhibits temporal order of a certain sort. (*Temporal order* or regularity differs from *spatial order*, an arrangement of parts that serves the purpose of a greater whole, as in an organism’s suitability for its environment.) The universe is governed by simple, mathematically formulable physical laws. These fundamental regularities in turn result in regularity at the phenomenal level, which human beings and other higher animals can then use to further their goals. Let us call this sort of temporal order *causal order*. Since the fundamental regularities cannot be explained in terms of other regularities, theories of evolution that partially undermine the argument from spatial order leave the following argument from causal order untouched.

- (1) The universe exhibits causal order (“there [are] laws of nature at some level guaranteeing that things behave in largely predictable ways” [Swinburne 2004, p. 160]).
- (2) If there is no God, causal order is very improbable (“it is very improbable that there would be in a Godless universe laws of nature sufficiently simple for rational beings to extrapolate from past to future with normal success” [Swinburne 2004, p. 164]).
- (3) If there is a God, causal order is relatively probable (“Theism leads us to expect a world at some phenomenal level, simple and predictable” [Swinburne 2004, p. 165]).
- (4) Hence, God’s existence is confirmed (its probability is increased) by the existence of causal order.

Naturalism (which Swinburne equates with physicalism) offers no explanation for the causal order of the universe (not to mention its existence); on naturalism causal order must simply be regarded as a brute fact. On the other hand, a personal being has reasons to produce causal order in the universe, due to aesthetic (order is more beautiful than chaos) and other value considerations (a universe with intelligent beings who can understand their world is preferable to a universe with no intelligent beings or with rational creatures whose attempts to “read the book of Nature” cannot succeed). Causal order combines with additional data that exhibit properties (a) and (b) above to support the further conclusion that *theism is more probable than naturalism*, even if the probability of theism is not greater than .5. Theism is the best available explanation of these data.

Of course, the (alleged) fact that the complexity or causal order of the universe increases the probability of theism is significant only if theism has some initial probability that can be raised or lowered by evidence. Critics point to the difficulty of assigning *a priori* objective probabilities to large-scale metaphysical theories. Swinburne is sensitive to this point, but he argues that both naturalism and theism have some level of initial probability (on *a priori* evidence alone) – though that level is very small simply because it is *a priori* very likely that nothing at all exists. Swinburne then argues that, with respect to comparing prior probabilities of competing hypotheses of equal scope like theism and naturalism, simplicity is the only criterion available for preferring one over the other. Since theism is a simpler hypothesis than naturalism, theism has the greater initial probability (Swinburne 2004, pp. 96ff).

Further scrutiny falls on Swinburne's conclusion, which posits only a personal cause, not a being that exists necessarily. But Swinburne claims that a necessary being cannot provide a complete explanation of finite, contingent beings, so positing a necessary being will not explain the existence of the universe. Still, considerations of simplicity lead us to posit only one person as the cause of the universe, a person with infinite knowledge and power who exists eternally. Any finite amount of power or knowledge, and any times in which the being does not exist, would require further explanation and so complicate the theistic hypothesis.

The above version of the teleological argument is just one part of Swinburne's cumulative case in favor of the greater probability of theism over naturalism. The wider case for theism draws strength from a variety of unrelated features of our universe that similarly (and independently) confirm theism and, in some cases, also disconfirm naturalism. Such features include the existence in the universe of consciousness and moral awareness in humans, as well as evidence of providence, divine revelation, miracles, and religious experiences. Swinburne considers the problem of evil as well, but concludes that evil and suffering do not disconfirm theism. The claim that they do stems "from a failure to appreciate the deepest needs of human beings and other conscious beings ... and the strength of the logical constraints on the kinds of world that a God can make" (Swinburne 2004, p. 267).

## Arguments from the Sciences

While Swinburne's argument focuses on the rationality of the universe and its laws, a more recent strategy (that Swinburne adds to his arsenal of arguments in the second edition of *The Existence of God*) appeals to the so-called "fine-tuning" of the fundamental forces that make our universe capable of supporting life. Just as the earliest versions of the design argument drew much of their material and impetus from discoveries in the sciences, especially the study of anatomy and botany, so the argument has received new life from the vast expansion of scientific knowledge in the last 20 or 30 years concerning the origins of the universe and of life on earth. Many of these discoveries are summarized by M. A. Corey (1993) and brought together into a teleological argument for the existence of God. Drawing on the work of scientists such as Paul Davies (1982, 1984, 2007), Sir John Eccles (1970), Fred Hoyle (1993), and Robert Jastrow (1978), Corey argues that the numerous factors necessary to make life possible are



enormously varied and are causally independent of one another. Even minute deviations in any one of them would have rendered life impossible. Thus, either we are faced with a truly astonishing amount of lucky coincidence in our universe, or the universe was caused by a being who intended it to produce life.

Stephen Layman (2007, pp. 110–11) provides a helpful summary of this argument and responds to several common criticisms of it in a recent book defending God's existence:

- If the initial force of the big bang explosion had been slightly stronger or weaker – by as little as one part in  $10^{60}$ , then life would be impossible.
- There is an “almost unbelievable delicacy in the balance between gravity and electromagnetism within a star. Calculations show that changes in the strength of either force by only one part in  $10^{40}$  would spell catastrophe for stars like the Sun” (Davies 1984, p. 242).
- If the weak nuclear force ... had been slightly stronger or weaker, heavy elements could not have formed. And heavy elements such as carbon are presumably necessary for life.
- If the strong nuclear force ... had been just 2 percent stronger (relative to the other forces), all hydrogen would have been converted into helium. ... If [it] had been 5 percent weaker, there would be nothing but hydrogen. Either way, life would presumably be impossible.
- If the electromagnetic force were 4 percent weaker, there would be no hydrogen. But hydrogen fuels the stars, including of course the Sun. If [it] were a little stronger, there would be no planets.

Data like these appear to offer strong empirical support for intelligent purpose behind the universe.

It is worth noting, however, that the fine-tuning argument presupposes that it is a good thing for a universe to be compatible with life – either physical life in general or intelligent physical life. Without this presupposition, it might indeed be highly improbable that the basic physical forces of the universe have the values they do, but it would not inspire the same kind of awe. Atheists who consider the fine-tuning argument often appear unimpressed by this data, replying that it is sheer hubris to assume human life has been a goal of the universe from its beginning, as opposed to being a random result that happens to be a lucky break for us.

Indeed, there is little reason to think that values in and of themselves impact physical forces like those involved in the big bang. Rather, values influence physical events by way of intelligent agents who have reason to foster the good. This connection explains why philosophers committed to naturalism are reluctant to characterize the kinds of data listed above as “tuning” of any sort, since that very term introduces notions of purpose and agency. On the other hand, naturalists may well lose sympathy if they insist (as they should) that a life-sustaining universe is nothing special *per se*.

It may seem that this dispute makes further discussion of fine-tuning arguments otiose, but that would be too hasty. After all, theism has a double advantage here, since it both endorses the widespread intuition that human life is an objective good and explains why the universe is constructed so as to realize this good. In other words, if

God exists, this is the kind of world one would expect God to create, one containing moral agents who are capable of compassion, self-sacrifice, and generosity. While theists have wrestled for centuries with the problem of evil, now atheists must confront an analogous problem – the problem of good. Why is our universe such as to result in the beauty, goodness, and moral value that exist even in our small part of it?

Setting this issue aside for now, can naturalists provide a plausible explanation for the fact that a life-sustaining universe, wildly improbable from a statistical point of view, happens to exist? Some responses claim that certain parameters in the fine-tuning examples are not independent of each other (and so are not separately tuned) and that some would not have to be as finely tuned as was initially believed; but these do little to diminish the problem, since several highly unlikely data remain unexplained. One proposal that seems to be gaining popularity among naturalists is the so-called many universes hypothesis. This theory posits a universe-generator of some kind that produces countless universes, each with fundamental physical constants (either the familiar ones or others) set at varying levels and giving rise to a wide variety of resulting worlds, some of which are life-sustaining. The goal of this proposal is to reduce the statistical improbability of a life-sustaining universe by multiplying the number of chances there are to produce such an outcome.

Theists (and some naturalists as well) raise numerous objections to the many universes theory. First among them is that it is not a scientific theory. Superstring theorist Brian Greene opines, “It will be extremely hard, if not impossible, for us ever to know if the multiverse picture is true” (1999, p. 122). Universes differing in their physical laws from ours and operating in causal independence of our universe (otherwise they would not be separate universes) are in principle empirically inaccessible. Further, depending on the properties of the universe-generator, it could still be highly unlikely that any of its products are life-sustaining. The multiverse theory has an air of the *ad hoc* about it and has so far failed to gain the universal support even of committed naturalists. On the other hand, the fine-tuning argument presupposes that life (or human life) is valuable, a premise that many committed atheists reject.

Historically, the argument from design draws its impetus from advances in the natural sciences. Evidence of teleology in nature made an impression on ancient philosophers as early as Aristotle, and application of the scientific method and new instruments in the modern period resulted in further discoveries of adaptation, mathematical elegance, and remarkable organization at every level of the natural world. The world of living things in particular provides numerous examples of complex physical structures that serve a particular purpose or function, and William Paley and others saw these as evidence for an intelligent maker. Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, introduced in the nineteenth century, appeared to provide a naturalistic explanation for these biological organs and organisms, provoking some premature jubilation on the part of naturalists who assumed it would be only a matter of time until naturalistic explanations could account for every purported instance of design in nature.

Recent versions of the design argument have similarly been fueled by scientific discoveries. While Swinburne’s original argument makes little appeal to new scientific research, he bypasses Darwin’s critique of earlier design arguments by looking to physics rather than to biology for evidence of rational agency. More recently, both Swinburne and Layman (among others) explicitly appeal to the fine-tuning argument,

drawing on recent work in physical cosmology. These developments suggest that the design argument for God's existence will continue to hold philosophical interest, and that the progress of science, once expected to bring about the death of design, will instead continue to uncover further intriguing instances of it.

## Probability and World Hypotheses

Swinburne credits his argument from the orderliness of the universe with the status of *confirming* the existence of God, even if it does not by itself make the existence of God more probable than not. He reasons that the orderliness of the universe, while having some level of probability on the atheistic view, is much more likely on the theistic view, so the existence of a complex and ordered universe increases the probability of the theistic view over that of atheism. A similar strategy could be offered in defense of the scientific arguments advanced above. One must show that the level of cooperation among causally independent physical factors necessary to produce organized, living, conscious beings is (a) very unlikely from an atheistic perspective, and (b) quite likely (or at least not as unlikely) on the assumption of God's existence. Swinburne's effort to show that a designer would have good reason to make rational creatures is relevant to (b).

John Hick objects to any attempt to compare the probability of theism vs. naturalism, viewed as hypotheses which can explain all our knowledge and experience: "There can be no prior corpus of propositions in relation to which a total interpretation could be judged to be probable or improbable, since all our particular items of information are included within the totality which is being interpreted. There can, in other words, be no evidence in favor of one total interpretation over against another" (1970, p. 29). But later on Hick offers the existence of suffering in the world as evidence counting against the theistic hypothesis, while certain features of our moral experience count in its favor. Clearly, then, there are propositions common to both interpretations which can be used to evaluate the evidence under consideration. One such proposition would be that an all-powerful, all-knowing, perfectly good being would not allow the existence of gratuitous suffering. But another would be the claim found in Aquinas's Fifth Way: "Whatever lacks knowledge cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence" (*Summa Theologiae*, I.2.3).

One might also appeal to canons of scientific rationality, as does Swinburne in contending that the theistic hypothesis is superior on grounds of simplicity. Theism postulates one personal agent to explain the complex, ordered universe, whereas naturalism must postulate a variety of different basic entities with various powers and liabilities, with no apparent reason why there are just these and no others. Further, the agent posited by theists is the simplest sort of personal agent possible, says Swinburne – namely, one who has infinite knowledge and power, and who possesses these properties essentially. Otherwise, more complicated explanations would be needed of why there are exactly  $n$  deities, why and how they cooperate in their efforts, why they have exactly  $n$  level of power or knowledge, and so on (Swinburne 1979, p. 141). Unless its perfections are essential to it, we would also need an explanation of why the being has the perfections it does.

Critics of Swinburne contend that the kinds of simplicity he appeals to are more at home in the physical sciences and may not be relevant to metaphysical problems. In a more direct attack, J. L. Mackie argues that personal agency is not well understood by us, and that positing a disembodied spiritual being who acts on the material world by unmediated intentional states loses in plausibility whatever it gains in simplicity (Mackie 1982, ch. 8). If the postulated being is outside of time and yet acts in such a way as to affect the temporal order, the conceptual difficulties are even greater. Mackie also invokes the Humean claim that the organizing capacities of an infinite mind would be just as much in need of explanation as the organized material world that results from its activity. Swinburne could reply that while we experience the organizing capacities of minds in the case of our own activity, we do not experience a similar purposive operation in unconscious natural systems.

Mackie's final complaint is that since Swinburne posits only a *contingently existing* being behind the natural universe, he has simply pushed the need for explanation back a step (see Chapter 33, Necessity). The existence of this being will remain unexplained, so it will be a matter of preference whether to choose one unexplained element (God) in one's metaphysical picture of things or several (the most basic material particles). Further, for any theist committed to divine freedom, God's choice to create the universe itself requires an explanation. This means that theists must defend a notion of personal explanation that accepts intentions as explanations of actions even when there is no law-like or logically necessary connection between those intentions and the resulting actions.

In assessing the dispute between the world-hypotheses of theism and naturalism, John Hick argues that the choice is not between having an explanation (God) and having no explanation, but rather between rival explanations. "Since theism and naturalism can each alike lay claim to *prima facie* evidences and must each admit the existence of *prima facie* difficulties, any fruitful comparison must treat the two alternative interpretations as comprehensive wholes, with their distinctive strengths and weaknesses" (1970, p. 31). But it seems more accurate to see the choice in this debate as similar to that involved in the cosmological argument. To say that apparent design is a result of chance or coincidence is in fact to leave it unexplained. The question, then, is whether the human mind can rest in this sort of final inexplicability, or whether reason requires us to postulate a cause of the highest-order contingent facts of our experience.

### Is the Designer God?

Since Hume it has been popular to dismiss the teleological argument on the grounds that even if it succeeds in its goal of showing that there is some sort of intelligence behind the orderliness of the universe, it can show little or nothing about the nature or even the present existence of the designer, including the number of beings involved in the creative effort. The most detailed reply to Hume comes from Swinburne's argument that considerations of simplicity would lead to the hypothesis of one intelligent being whose faculties are infinite and are held essentially.

As to the moral attributes of God, Swinburne argues both that omnipotence makes it likely that God is perfectly free in the sense that God's choices are not influenced by non-rational desires and that perfect freedom and omniscience together entail perfect goodness, given two plausible assumptions (for extended discussions of each of the divine attributes mentioned in this entry, see Part 4, The Concept of God). These are, first, that moral judgments are either true or false and, second, that free agents always act for a purpose and see their actions as aimed at a good. This implies that if the natural properties of the deity, including perfect freedom, are probable to a given extent, the moral properties will have at least that same level of probability. One might instead argue for the benevolence of God by noting various features of the world itself, including its fitness for the development of moral agents. Finally, some would look for elaboration of the nature of God to the cosmological or ontological arguments, since some versions of the former argue for a necessary being and the latter argues for a being with every perfection (including necessity).

Another advantage of the cumulative case approach, then, is that the emerging concept of God need not rest on one piece of evidence or one isolated proof. Instead, it emerges from a consideration of many different kinds of evidence, all of which point to a similar conclusion. These considerations may undermine some of Hume's complaints, but they do not fully overturn them. The presence of evil in the world does seem to count against the perfect goodness of the designer. However, Swinburne contends that the existence of evil in the world does nothing to disconfirm theism, but leaves its epistemic probability untouched (1979, ch. 11; see also Chapter 59, The Evidential Problem of Evil).

Since much of the current excitement surrounding design arguments has been generated by scientists, it is likely that the debate will center for the near future around the controversies in physics and biology over the evidence for purpose in nature (see Chapter 63, Theism and Physical Cosmology). More philosophical precision should be brought to bear on the kind of probability involved in the testing of metaphysical hypotheses, on the epistemic value of what Swinburne calls "confirming" arguments, and on the strength of the cumulative case strategy that draws on several distinct inductive-style arguments.

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## Moral Arguments

C. STEPHEN EVANS

Moral arguments for God's existence are, for lay people, among the most popular reasons for belief in God, though they have often been neglected by philosophers. The germ of this kind of argument is simple enough to be grasped by a child; it lies in the conviction that God is in some way the basis of morality, or, as Ivan put it in *The Brothers Karamazov*, "without God everything is permitted." However, this core intuition can be developed in multiple ways, with greater or lesser degrees of sophistication. Thus, there are probably even more different kinds of moral arguments for theism than there are different forms of the cosmological and teleological arguments (see Chapter 43, Cosmological Arguments; and Chapter 44, Teleological and Design Arguments).

### Theistic Arguments in General

Before looking at moral arguments one must first think about the functions of arguments for God's existence in general. Few philosophers today would view a single argument for God's reality as a *proof*. This is partly because of a recognition that even good philosophical arguments rarely amount to a proof, and partly because of a recognition of the complexity of belief in God. "Theism" does not refer to a single proposition, but a complex web of assertions about God's reality, character, and relations with the universe. It is unreasonable to think that a single argument could establish such a complicated theoretical network. Rather, particular theistic arguments should be seen as providing a lesser or greater degree of support to segments of the network and therefore support for the web as a whole only indirectly.

Many common criticisms of theistic arguments seem not to appreciate this point. For example, the teleological argument is often criticized on the grounds that even if sound, it would only establish a divine designer and not a creator. However, no single argument can be expected to establish all the attributes of God. Similarly, it would be a mistake to reject moral arguments on the grounds that such arguments do not prove the existence of a God with all of the attributes of classical theism. Rather, such arguments will be useful in a "cumulative case" for theism if they increase the plausibility of belief in God by providing support for at least some elements of the theistic web (see the discussion of "distributive" cases in Chapter 49, Cumulative Cases).



## Difficulties with Moral Arguments

As I have noted, moral arguments have not been discussed by philosophers as much as their popularity would suggest. This is likely due to a widespread sense that such arguments are vulnerable to devastating objections, even though a careful look reveals that these objections are not necessarily decisive. One problem is that many philosophers think such arguments are tied to “divine command” theories of morality, and that these theories are both philosophically and religiously flawed (see Chapter 68, Divine Command Ethics). A line of thought that stems from Plato’s *Euthyphro* holds that an action is not morally wrong merely because God forbids it, or permissible merely because he does not forbid it. Would gratuitous torture be morally right if God commanded such actions to be done? Religious believers often hold that God commands certain actions because of their right character; that is partly why they see God as good and worthy of worship (see Chapter 30, Goodness). However, if this is so, then it is not the fact that those actions are commanded that makes them right.

These kinds of considerations certainly create difficulties for certain forms of divine command theories of morality. However, Philip Quinn (1978) has argued very powerfully that such objections, as well as several others commonly made against divine command theories, are by no means decisive. Even aside from whether the difficulties can be surmounted, there are, as we shall see below, types of divine command theories to which such objections do not apply. Furthermore, even though it is clear that a divine command theory of morality certainly can provide the basis for a moral argument, it is by no means the case that all moral arguments depend on a divine command theory of morality.

A second type of objection, also discussed by Quinn, stems from Immanuel Kant’s doctrine of moral autonomy. Kant held that a person should be devoted to morality for duty’s sake alone, but some philosophers believe that if morality is thought to depend upon God, then one’s commitment to morality would not be unconditional. However, as the example of Kant himself shows, it is far from clear that a belief that morality is somehow linked to God necessarily violates autonomy. Even if connecting morality to belief in God creates a problem for autonomy in some senses, it is not obvious that autonomy in these senses is truly essential for the moral life.

Richard Swinburne, in an early book (1979, pp. 175–9), rejects moral arguments that start from the existence of moral truths for a very different reason. (Swinburne does, in the second edition of this book [2004], defend a moral argument of a different type, discussed below.) In his overall case for theism, he claims that basic moral principles are analytic in character and necessarily true. We have no need of any explanation of such truths, any more than we need to explain why a brother is a male sibling, and therefore no need of any theistic explanation. Swinburne argues that a world in which the basic moral principles do not hold cannot be coherently conceived.

However, Swinburne’s view here is doubtful for several reasons. There are many people, moral nihilists and relativists, for example, who appear coherently to conceive of the world as one in which no objective moral principles at all hold, so it is hard to see how claims that such principles hold could be analytic. Even people who do agree with Swinburne about the basic principles of morality sometimes worry, after reading

such thinkers as Sigmund Freud and Friedrich Nietzsche, that such beliefs might be an illusion. Furthermore, even if Swinburne were correct that many moral principles are *necessary* truths, it would not necessarily follow that such principles are purely analytic. Swinburne appears to think that necessary truths must be analytic, but this is dubious. Many philosophers would argue that “water is H<sub>2</sub>O” is a necessary truth, but it is hardly analytic. Furthermore, the fact that water is necessarily H<sub>2</sub>O by no means rules out the need for an explanation for the structure of water. In a similar way a theist might hold that even if moral truths are necessary, they require explanation and such explanations might involve God. For example, it might be the case that “It is morally obligatory to obey the commands of a good God” is a necessary truth. If God exists necessarily and commands what he commands necessarily, then moral truths can still be necessary in this view (see Chapter 33, Necessity). However, even if this is so there is surely a sense in which God’s commands would be part of what explains what is morally obligatory. Moreover, it also seems possible that some of God’s commands might not be necessary; God might, for example, give a command that humans should rest for two days a week rather than one. In that case not all moral truths would be necessary truths. Moral arguments may fail, but there is no obvious reason to think they must.

## Types of Moral Arguments

The most famous and influential moral arguments were those offered by Kant (1956 [1788]). However, the fourth of Thomas Aquinas’s “Five Ways” is best understood as a type of moral argument, and this argument itself seems to rest on ideas traceable to Plato and Aristotle. Other philosophers and theologians who have developed or defended moral arguments include Cardinal Newman, Hastings Rashdall, W. R. Sorley, A. E. Taylor, Austin Farrer, and H. P. Owen. The moral argument presented by C. S. Lewis (1952), in his amazingly popular *Mere Christianity*, though of course not directed to a philosophical audience, is very likely the most widely-convincing apologetic argument of the twentieth century.

The most fundamental distinction to be drawn between types of moral arguments is that between theoretical and practical arguments. Theoretical arguments are aimed at showing that some propositions about God are true, or at increasing the likelihood or probability of their truth. Such arguments typically take some feature of morality or moral experience as data to be explained and try to show that God provides the best explanation of those data. For example, if one believes that people are sometimes obligated to act in certain ways, and one also holds a divine command theory of obligation, one might hold that the fact that people are under obligation is best explained by the fact that God issues certain commands.

Within the general category of theoretical arguments there is tremendous variety. Such arguments may vary by taking different features of the moral life as the data to be explained, by having different accounts of that feature of the moral life, or by offering different accounts as to how that feature is related to and thus explained by God. For example, a philosopher might begin with the sheer fact that some states of affairs have moral value, or the existence of obligations. Other arguments might cite the knowledge of moral obligations as the moral fact to be explained, or cite the special authority

morality seems to have for humans. Moral arguments could even begin with such concrete phenomena as conscience or guilt. Swinburne, though still rejecting a moral argument from the existence of moral obligations, now defends an argument that takes as its starting point the existence of moral awareness among humans (2004, pp. 215–218). Very different accounts of the nature of all these phenomena could be offered, as well as different theories as to how God is supposed to ground or provide an explanation of the feature in question. The overall project will likely include a defense of the reality or objectivity of the feature in question against the moral skeptic, as well as a critique of rival, secular explanations. Some contemporary versions of this type of moral argument will be examined below.

Practical moral arguments aim not at establishing the truth or probability of some propositions about God but rather at making evident the reasonableness of belief on practical grounds (see Chapter 50, Pragmatic Arguments). Some feature of my situation as a moral agent makes belief reasonable or perhaps even necessary for me. The conclusion of such an argument is not “(Probably) God exists,” but something like “(Probably) I ought to believe in God.”

### Kant’s Practical Moral Argument

Though the most famous proponent of a practical moral argument was Kant (1956 [1788]), at times he presents arguments of a more theoretical character as well. He rejected all theoretical attempts to show that God’s existence could be known, but held nevertheless that a rational moral agent should believe in God. Kant believed strongly in autonomy and thus held that I as a moral being should seek to do my moral duty because of duty and not because of any particular end that I desire. An action is obligatory because of the formal maxim it expresses rather than the end the maxim enjoins. Nevertheless, whenever I act, and therefore whenever I act from duty, I necessarily seek an end.

Since Kant held that happiness is a good that all human beings seek, he believed that the supreme end of the moral life, the complete or highest good, is a world where people are both morally virtuous and happy, and where their happiness is proportional to their virtue. He claimed that one could not reasonably believe that such an end is attainable unless God exists. Empirically there is little reason to think that the world proportions happiness to virtue. However, if the world itself is the creation of a morally good being then there is a basis for hope that my efforts to bring about the highest good will not be wasted or completely ineffectual in the long run.

The heart of Kant’s argument is the principle that “ought implies can.” If I am obligated to seek to bring about the highest good, then the highest good must be attainable. If it is attainable only if God exists, then it is reasonable for me to believe that God exists.

Kant’s argument is vulnerable at a number of points. Opponents have argued that the highest good in his sense is not really a required moral goal, and that even if it is, the possibility of its attainment requires only the possibility of God’s existence rather than God’s actual existence. Nevertheless, even if this particular argument of Kant is not successful, the core intuition that seems to underlie it retains force, and thus there

are other practical versions of the argument that can be formulated. (Kant himself develops the argument in a number of interesting ways.)

That intuition could be stated like this: If I am truly to live as a moral being, I must be able to believe that the world of which I am a part and in which I must act must in some sense be a moral world, even if all appearances are to the contrary. It is difficult for a moral agent to strive for moral ends in the world and at the same time believe that the world is fundamentally alien to those ends. To live the moral life I must believe that the causal structure of nature is such that progress toward certain ends can be achieved through moral struggle, but that in turn requires that I conceive nature itself as in some way containing a moral order. There may be various ways of conceiving such a moral order, but the theistic understanding of nature as the creation of a morally good being is surely one way of doing so.

It may be objected that such an argument is not purely practical in nature but also theoretical. This seems correct, since the argument really points out an oddity in the situation of a moral agent that can be resolved by thinking of nature in a particular manner. Nevertheless, conceiving of the argument as purely theoretical fails to capture some of its appeal; what is at stake is not merely the resolution of an intellectual puzzle but the possibility of moral action itself.

Other philosophers object to practical arguments on the grounds that such arguments are immoral or irresponsible in that they justify belief without justifying the truth of what is believed. Certainly such arguments should not be employed to evade evidence. Nevertheless, William James (1897) argued that where certain conditions are met, such a prudential or pragmatic argument is a reasonable basis for belief. For James, these conditions included the following: (1) the believer must find the proposition being considered believable yet find that the question cannot be decided on purely theoretical grounds; (2) the believer must be in a situation where some decision is practically required; and (3) the decision must involve some momentous good. Because of the last two conditions, agnosticism is not a practical option.

## Some Contemporary Moral Arguments

Though moral arguments for theism have not been a major focus of philosophical discussion in the latter half of the twentieth century, there have been some interesting treatments. Robert Adams (1987, pp. 144–63) has developed both a theoretical and a practical form of the moral argument. His theoretical argument is closely linked to his defense of a “modified” divine command theory of ethical wrongness. According to this theory, in its final form (pp. 139–43), ethical wrongness is identical with the property of being contrary to the commands of a loving God. If there is no God, or if a God exists but is not loving, then nothing would be morally right or wrong. Adams’ version of the divine command theory is not vulnerable to the objection that divine commands are arbitrary since they are rooted in God’s loving character. Such a theory does not attempt to explain the whole of morality, but only the specific qualities of moral rightness and wrongness. It presupposes that some things, such as love, have value independently of God’s commands.

The strengths of this theory, according to Adams, lie in its ability to make sense of both the objective cognitive status of judgments about ethical wrongness, and in the fact that such judgments appear to state “non-natural” facts, a non-natural fact being one that cannot be completely stated in the languages of the natural sciences, including psychology. Some other meta-ethical theories, such as prescriptivism, capture the non-natural aspect of morality at the expense of cognitivism; others, such as hedonistic naturalism, make such judgments cognitive at the expense of reducing them to judgments about natural facts.

If Adams’ divine command theory is true, then a sound moral argument can easily be constructed. If some actions are morally wrong, and moral wrongness consists in being contrary to the commands of a loving God, then there must be a loving God. If such a theory is not only true but plausible, then the corresponding argument must have some force as well. Actually, in order to mount a moral argument for God’s existence on the basis of a divine command theory, it is not even necessary for such a theory to cover all moral rightness and wrongness. It will be sufficient if there are *some* moral obligations known to hold which depend on God’s commands, and even those who reject a divine command theory of moral obligations in general may concede that some commands of God may create moral duties, just as the legitimate orders of a government or parent may create duties.

George Mavrodes (1986) has developed a theoretical version of the moral argument that does not rest on a divine command theory. Mavrodes’ argument takes the form of an attempt to show that certain moral facts, specifically the existence of some moral obligations, would be strange and inexplicable in a naturalistic universe. He begins by describing what he calls a “Russellian universe,” the kind of universe that a philosopher such as Bertrand Russell believed was the actual universe. In such a universe, everything that exists and occurs is ultimately the result of “accidental collocations of atoms,” and there is no hope for life after death or any ultimate future for the universe.

Mavrodes argues that common naturalistic explanations of moral obligations fail, by trying to show that morality in a Russellian universe would be strange or absurd. For example, he argues that moral obligations cannot consist solely of feelings of obligation, because real obligations can be present where such feelings are absent, and feelings of obligation can exist even where no actual obligations hold. Naturalistic attempts to explain morality as a kind of enlightened self-interest fail as well. It may be true that it is in the best interests of everyone *collectively* for every individual to act morally, but it does not follow from this that it is always in every individual’s interest to act morally. Even if it were true that it would be in the individual’s interest to act morally if everyone else would do so, it is difficult to see how such a conditional claim could produce real obligations in the actual world, where it is certain that not everyone else will act morally.

Nor is it the case that morality can be explained in terms of evolutionary theory (see Chapter 64, Theism and Evolutionary Biology). Evolution could perhaps explain why certain creatures with moral beliefs and feelings have evolved if we assume that having such beliefs and feelings would have some survival advantage. However, such an explanation does not enable us to understand actual moral obligations. It would appear to explain, not moral obligations, but only the illusion that there are such things.

As Mavrodes sees it, the problem with all such naturalistic views is that they make morality ultimately a superficial, rather than fundamental, aspect of the universe, since what is ultimate in such a view is “accidental collocations of atoms.” Morality makes much more sense in a universe in which things like persons, minds, and purposes are “deeper.” A theistic universe is clearly one of the ways in which that might be the case. Insofar as moral obligations revolve around respecting the value and worth of persons and the creations of persons, it makes sense to say such obligations must be taken seriously. After all, such a universe is one where a personal God is the ultimate reality (see Chapter 16, Personalism). Theistic religious traditions have usually viewed the natural world as having value because it is God’s creation, and human persons and human creations as having special value and dignity because they are created in God’s image.

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## Arguments from Consciousness and Free Will

STEWART GOETZ

While some philosophers have constructed arguments for the existence of God which begin with distinctive features of the external world (e.g., contingency or finiteness in the case of the cosmological argument [see Chapter 43, Cosmological Arguments] and order or complexity in the case of the teleological argument [see Chapter 44, Teleological and Design Arguments]), others have developed arguments which begin with distinctive features of the internal world of the self. For example, Kant (1956) argued that the existence of God was a necessary postulate of practical (moral) reasoning (see Chapter 45, Moral Arguments), and C. S. Lewis (2001) argued that the occurrence of reasoning or inference in which apprehension of certain mental contents (e.g., “All men are mortal” and “Socrates is a man”) causes another apprehension of mental content (e.g., “Socrates is mortal”) implies the existence of a mind which is non-natural (above nature or the natural order) and whose existence depends upon the existence of a necessary mind, or God, who does not reason but knows directly or without inference all that can be known.

If we confine ourselves to the internal world of the self, there are additional features which seemingly transcend the natural order and point toward or suggest the existence of God (cf. Adams 1987 and Swinburne 2004, ch. 9). For example, we are conscious beings. More than that, however, we are *self*-conscious beings. About what does the first-person awareness of ourselves inform us? Three data are particularly striking. First, the self or “I” seems to be a simple entity in the sense that it seems to be a substance that is not made up of other substances which are its parts. So striking is this fact that philosophers have termed this natural conception of the self the “simple view.” Second, the self seems to make indeterministic, uncaused, simple choices in the sense that a choice is a simple event with no event parts and is ultimately and irreducibly explained teleologically by a purpose or reason. This natural conception of the self can be termed the “teleological view.” Third, the self is the subject of seemingly intrinsically qualitatively simple experiences, like those of pleasure and pain, in the sense that these experiences are, like choices, events with no event parts. Philosophers refer to these intrinsically qualitative experiences as “qualia” (singular “quale”). An apt name for this natural conception of the self is the “qualitative view.” Each of the simple, teleological, and qualitative views deserves elaboration.

## The Simple View

The self of the simple view is often called a “soul” or a “mind.” A soul, as a substance, has or exemplifies essential properties or characteristics that it cannot lose without ceasing to exist. These essential properties include powers to act and capacities (propensities) to be acted upon. When a soul exercises one of its powers, it is an agent, and when it has one of its capacities actualized, it is a patient. A soul has various essential psychological powers, including the power to think about, consider, or focus on different issues (e.g., think about the soul-body distinction) and the power to choose to act (e.g., choose to become a philosopher). Essential capacities of a soul include the capacity to experience pleasure and the capacity to experience pain, and the capacities to desire (e.g., to desire a drink of water or sex) and to believe (e.g., to believe that writing this essay is hard work or that God exists). Given this characterization of a soul in terms of its essential psychological powers and capacities, it is important to make two additional points.

First, one should recognize that while the power to think is an essential property of a soul, a soul need not continuously exercise this power in order to exist. Moreover, a particular soul, having a particular thought such as *the Red Sox will win the World Series*, might not have had that thought and yet would still be the same soul. Similarly, though a soul might choose, as a way of life, to forego performing certain kinds of action (e.g., smoking or using habit-forming drugs) as ways of fulfilling its desire for pleasure, it might also choose a different way of life. Whichever choice it makes, it would still be the same soul. The idea here is that particular exercisings of the powers of thought and choice are non-essential or accidental in nature, and it is because they are that we believe that a person could have thought and chosen different things and still have been the same soul. This point about the accidental nature of particular thoughts and choices accounts for the belief that while one chose to be a college professor, one might have chosen instead to have been a lawyer and still have been the same soul. Similarly, because particular thoughts, choices, and personality traits are accidental in nature, a person who enters prison as a bitter, cold-blooded killer can exit as a thankful, kind-hearted individual who seeks to promote the well-being of others.

Second, one must be equally mindful of the fact that while a soul has multiple essential, psychological powers and capacities, these powers and capacities are not themselves substances (they are not substantive). Because they are properties and not substances, powers and capacities cannot be separated from and exist independently of a particular soul such that they are able (have the capacity) to become parts of other souls or substances. They are not substantive, separable parts of a soul in the way that a portion of the table on which I am writing (e.g., the top, a leg) is a substantive, separable part of the table which can exist independently of the table and become a part of another substance (e.g., a leg of a table can become a leg of a stool or a rung in a ladder). Thus, a table, unlike a soul, is a complex substance in virtue of the fact that it is made up of parts that are themselves substances (substantive parts). Physical scientists inform us that a table is actually a lattice structure of molecules bound together by attractive powers affecting appropriate capacities, and when this lattice structure is broken by a sufficient force, the table breaks. Unlike a table and material objects in

general, a soul is substantively simple in nature. While a soul is complex insofar as it has a multiplicity of properties, it is simple in so far as it has no substantive parts. Thus, complexity at the level of propertyhood is compatible with simplicity at the level of thinghood.

### The Teleological View

A choice is an indeterministic, uncaused, simple exercising of the power to choose for a purpose or reason. It is important to distinguish between a choice that has no explanation and a choice that has no cause. The former kind of choice is necessarily random while the latter is not. Because an uncaused choice is made for one of the reasons constituting the agent's psychological make-up at the time of choice, it has an explanation. When an agent S chooses to act, she does so *in order to* accomplish or bring about a purpose (an end or goal). In general, a teleological explanation of a choice to perform an action involves an agent (1) conceiving of (or representing in the content of a propositional attitude such as a belief or a desire) the *future* as including a state of affairs that is a purpose to be brought about or produced for the sake of its goodness; (2) conceiving of or representing in a belief the means to the realization or bringing about of this end, where the means begin with the agent performing an action; and (3) making a choice to perform that action in order to bring about that purpose. Borrowing a term of art from discussions of the nature of propositional attitudes, teleological and causal explanations have different *directions of fit*. While a teleological explanation is future-to-present in character, a causal explanation is past-to-present in nature. In order to do adequate justice to this direction of fit, one must not only include the idea that a reason is a conceptual entity, an *ens rationis* or intentional object that is about or directed at the future, but also add that it is optative in mood. Thus, while a reason is not a desire or a belief, its optative character stems from its being *grounded in* the content of a desire or belief that represents a future state of affairs as good and something to be brought about by a more temporally proximate chosen action of the person who has the desire or belief.

To illustrate the optative, conceptual nature of a reason, consider the case of a businesswoman B who has conflicting reasons to act. She is on the way to a meeting that is important to her career when she observes an assault in an alley. An inner struggle arises out of a moral belief that she should stop to help the victim and a desire that she continue on to the meeting for the sake of her career ambitions. Let us assume that B chooses to return to help the victim. What is the explanation for her choice? Well, she believes that the victim's well-being is in jeopardy and that her returning to help the victim is morally right. In light of this belief, her reason or purpose for acting is *that she do what is morally right* (which, in terms of the first person, is *that I do what is morally right*), and the teleological explanatory relation is expressed by saying that she chooses to return to help the victim *in order to* achieve or bring about the purpose that she do what is morally right. If B had chosen to continue on to the meeting because of her desire that she further her career, the content of her reason for choosing would have been *that she further her career* (which, in terms of the first person, is *that I further my*

career). She would have chosen *in order to* achieve or bring about the purpose that she advance her career.

A final example will help. Assume that B is aware that her husband is ill and that she sends for a doctor. One might think that it is the husband's being ill, an actual state of affairs of the world, that is B's reason for sending for the doctor. On the teleological view, it is not the husband's being ill that is B's reason for sending for the doctor. Rather, her reason is the purpose that her husband be well, which is grounded in the content of a propositional attitude such as *her desire that he be well* (which represents a future, non-actual state of affairs). Therefore, if B chooses to send for the doctor, she does so in order to achieve or bring about the purpose that her husband be well.

## The Qualitative View

To illustrate the nature of an experience or quale of pain, consider the following story about a hypothetical scientist named "Mary" (cf. Jackson 1982). For whatever reason, Mary has spent her entire life up until now locked in a room and somehow managed never to experience pain. While locked in the room, Mary has spent her time learning all the physical facts that can be known about pain, including that pain is produced by such-and-such physical objects that cause so-and-so neural happenings, which lead people to utter expletives, etc., etc. Her knowledge is exhaustive. One night, Mary is freed from the room and is invited to go bowling for the first time. As she picks up a bowling ball, she accidentally drops it on her foot and blurts out an expletive. She asks her host what it is that she has just experienced and he informs her that she has experienced pain.

Did Mary learn something new about pain? The obvious answer is "Yes." She learned for the first time what the *intrinsic nature* of pain is. While in the room, she only learned about *extrinsic, relational features* of pain. The point of the story about Mary is that there are more facts, namely, psychological facts, than the physical facts as disclosed in the physical sciences. Why couldn't Mary learn from her studies about the intrinsic nature of pain during the time that she was in the room? While part of the answer seems to be that the experiential nature of pain (for lack of a better word, the *ouchiness* of pain) can only be known from the first-person perspective which Mary lacked vis-à-vis pain, another part of the answer seems to be that physical explanations of the intrinsic natures of things/events about which Mary learned are typically given in terms of part-whole compositional and spatial terms. Take the solidity of a table on which a typical computer sits. The solidity of the table vis-à-vis the computer is explained in terms of a lattice structure of micro-parts held together by attractive bonds which are sufficiently strong to withstand pressures to be split apart that are exerted by objects such as a computer. Such explanations, however, won't work for an experience of pain because it is a defining characteristic of this event that it lacks an event structure. That is, an experience of pain is simple in nature in the sense that it is not made up of event parts. A baseball game is an event made up of a series of events (pitches, hits, catches, innings) and complex emotions like anger can be made up of parts such as the event of forming a judgment (e.g., that someone has wronged you) and the event of having certain

feelings (e.g., one might feel an intense aversion), but a simple case of feeling pain is not a structure composed of sub-events. Hence, it cannot be understood in such terms.

## Objections

The simple-teleological-qualitative view (STQV) of the self faces numerous objections. One kind of objection is invoked against all three components of STQV. It draws upon the distinction between the awareness of the absence of something and the failure to be aware of that something. In the case of the simple view, the objection is that no one is aware of the substantial simplicity of a self. While it is true that each of us fails to be aware of our self having any substantial parts, this does not support the view that the self lacks such parts. To understand why, consider the following example: Suppose one is asked whether an elephant is present in one's garage. If one looks around from where one stands and fails to see, feel, smell, etc., an elephant, one can justifiably conclude that no elephant is in the garage. This is because it is reasonable to assume that if an elephant were present, then all other things being equal (e.g., one's senses are in working order) one would be aware of it. Contrast this case with another where one is asked if there is a nail in the garage. If we assume that there are cars, bikes, mowers, trash bins, etc., in the garage, one could not justifiably conclude on the basis of one's failing to perceive a nail from where one stands that there is no nail in the garage. This is because it is unreasonable to assume that if a nail were there, then all other things being equal one would be aware of it. According to opponents of the simple view of the self, one's self is like the garage and one's relationship to substantial parts of it is like one's relationship to the nail and not to the elephant.

Now consider the teleological view. Here the objection is that no one is aware of making uncaused choices, though it is true that none of us is aware of our choices having causes. This lack of awareness does not support the view that those choices have no causes, unless one assumes that we are souls which perform mental actions the origins of which are transparent to us. But the objector has already questioned this. Far more plausible is the view that we are extremely complex information-processing systems which magnify small causes into large effects. Vast amounts of information arrive in the form of small amounts of energy. Because of the amplification powers of systems of switches, this information can ultimately be used causally to produce mental acts such as choices. The choices are observable macro effects of micro causes which are beyond the limits of our introspective powers. Therefore, from our failure to be aware of causes of our choices we cannot reasonably conclude that there are none. Our lack of awareness of the causes of our choices is to be expected and counts for nothing in support of their supposed absence. And if our choices have causes, a teleological explanation of them becomes both superfluous and dispensable.

Finally, there is the qualitative view. The objector who already denies the existence of the soul and the making of uncaused, teleologically explained choices typically *functionalizes* qualia, which means that he exhaustively analyzes them into causal inputs and outputs. For example, an experience of pain is no more than an instance of a kind of event which is caused by falling bricks, a hot burner on a stove, and so on, and which has the shaking of limbs and cries of woe as effects. It is only an informational event or

state whose nature is completely extrinsic in character. It is not also a quale with a simple nature that is intrinsically hurtful or *ouchy*. In response to the claim that there must be some intrinsic nature to an experience of pain which makes it capable of standing in cause-and-effect relations (that which stands in relationships is ontologically prior to those relations), the objector answers that there is a failure to be aware of what that intrinsic nature is because, after all, it is a micro informational state of which we see only its macro causes and effects.

## Concluding Remarks

In order to construct an argument for theism based on STQV, it would be necessary to rebut the objections discussed above and establish the truth of STQV without appealing to the truth of theism. (Similarly, to use the falsity of STQV as evidence for naturalism, one would first have to establish the falsity of STQV without presupposing the truth of naturalism.) This is not easy to do, if our theories and in particular our worldviews very much influence what we take the relevant data to be. Suppose, however, that STQV can be established without presupposing the truth of theism. Then (assuming theism is coherent) it can easily be shown that STQV supports theism to some degree, at least relative to naturalism, because STQV is clearly more surprising given naturalism than it is given theism. (For further discussion of closely related issues, see Chapter 65, Theism and the Scientific Understanding of the Mind.)

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## Miracles

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### What is a Miracle?

The word “miracle” originated from the Latin word for a wonderful thing or a surprise. However, to have religious significance, it is not sufficient that an event be merely wonderful. If the desk in front of me suddenly turned into a water buffalo, I would certainly be stupefied. But since such a fantastic metamorphosis would appear not to serve any divine purpose, the theist would not view it as a miracle.

In the Hebrew Bible a miracle is designated by the words *nes* or *oth*, both meaning “a sign.” The major function of a miracle is to serve as a spectacular manifestation of God’s direct intervention in promoting a divine plan, and thus to inspire religious sentiments (see Chapter 36, Divine Action).

There are some who think that there is an inherent contradiction in the very notion of a “miracle,” since a miracle is commonly thought of as a violation of some of nature’s laws. However, a regularity which may be broken fails by definition to be a law. Among the various replies to this objection, the one suggested by Richard Purtill is likely to be found fairly congenial. The United States, Purtill points out, has a large set of laws regulating human behavior, but occasionally exceptional procedures are introduced, like presidential pardons. A miracle may be compared to a presidential pardon, in that the origin of the pardon is outside the ordinary legal procedures. It is unpredictable, and plays no role in the maneuvering of a lawyer in the court, since it cannot be brought about by the means available to him during a court procedure. Similarly, the creation of miracles is not within the scope of a scientist’s activities. Yet, a presidential pardon does not constitute a violation of the legal system: it is not illegal, it is *outside* the legal system. In a comparable manner a miracle does not violate, but is outside, the system of nature’s laws (Purtill 1978, p. 70).

It is important to emphasize that in spite of the widespread belief to the contrary, an event may be the source of marvel and elicit genuine religious response, not only without violating any natural law, but even if all its details may be explained by known laws. As long as an event is genuinely startling and its timing constitutes a mind-boggling coincidence, in that it occurs precisely when there is a distinct call for it to promote some obvious divine objective, then that event amounts to a miracle. The promotion of a divine objective may take many forms: it could be a spectacular act of

deliverance of the faithful from the evil forces ranged against them, it might come as a highly unusual meteorological event through which the priests of Baal are discredited, or it might appear as a swift, clear, and loud answer to the prayers of the truly pious. However, whatever form the wondrous event takes, it should have a religious impact on its witnesses.

### Hume's Challenge

Arguably, the most widely discussed challenge to the belief in miracles has been the ingenious, highly compact, epistemological objection by David Hume. A wise man proportions his beliefs to the evidence, says Hume. Wisdom therefore should teach us that "no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony[']s ... falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavors to establish" (Hume 1748, sect. 10). It will be admitted by those of us lucky enough to have some exceptionally trustworthy friends, that none are so very reliable that any lie or erroneous statement escaping their lips would be no less of a marvel than, say, the sun standing still for Joshua. Thus, a rational individual will refuse to give credence to any miracle story.

For over two centuries many attempts have been made to blunt the sharp blow dealt by Hume to the credibility of miracle stories. Some have tried to counter Hume by saying that while he is right in claiming that "someone who has a strictly scientific view of the world ... can never be convinced of the truth of religion by testimony in favor of miracles" (Dawid and Gillies 1989, p. 64), an individual living in a religious cultural climate, in which the probability of occasional direct divine intervention in the physical world is not believed to be too small, is not prevented from entertaining the possibility of a miracle. It turns out then that Hume's argument might be circumvented by someone who allowed the possibility of religious knowledge as distinct from empirically based scientific knowledge (1989, p. 64).

This suggestion does not seem to help much. Recall that Hume said, "upon the whole we may conclude that the Christian religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one" (Hume 1748, sect. 10). Clearly miracles occur not for the benefit of the converted but for those who are meant to be attracted to religious belief for the first time. Thus if an agnostic brought up in a secular cultural climate could indeed never be induced through a miracle to change his or her position, then Dawid and Gillies' argument has not succeeded in strengthening, but rather in destroying, the foundations of theism.

### Price's Argument

A contemporary of Hume, R. Price, devised an argument showing that a fairly reliable individual's testimony is often accepted as adequate evidence even for the most improbable event. He argued that in the case of a lottery where, say, as many as  $10^8$  tickets have been sold, if an ordinary newspaper reports that ticket number  $n$  won the main prize, we believe it without a moment's hesitation. It seems to be of no concern to us

that the prior probability for ticket number  $n$  to land the biggest amount was negligibly small, that is,  $10^{-8}$  (Price 1767, pp. 410–11).

Price's putative counterexample to Hume's argument does not work. Obviously, the newspaper's report has to be accepted: if it were legitimate to doubt it, we would be committed to the absurdity that we are capable of prophesying at any time before the draw takes place that all the papers will print false information concerning the winner! This follows from the obvious fact that someone is bound to win, yet no matter who is claimed to have done so we are obliged to disbelieve it.

## The Case of the Church Choir

Let me cite an actual example which is likely to throw light on some important aspects of a miracle. *Life* magazine (March 27, 1950, p. 19) reported that all 15 members of a church choir in Beatrice, Nebraska, came at least 10 minutes late for their weekly choir practice that was supposed to start at 7:20 p.m. on March 1, 1950. They were astonishingly fortunate, because at 7:25 the building was destroyed by an explosion. The reasons for the delay of each member were fairly commonplace: none of them was marked by the slightest sign of any supernatural cause. However, nothing remotely resembling the situation in which *all* members were prevented from being on time on the same occasion had ever happened before. Furthermore, this singular event took place precisely when it was needed, on the very night on which they would otherwise have perished. Consequently, some people were inclined to see the incident as a clear instance of divine intervention and a compelling manifestation of God's care and power for everyone to see. How else should one explain such a spectacular coincidence which turned out to be the deliverance of people who were regarded as the most pious, and most intensely devoted to any church-associated work, and thus the most truly worthy to be saved, in a manner which (though it did not violate any law of nature) was too startling to be a mere happenstance?

First of all, let us note that even if the probability of any one member having a compelling reason to arrive late at the devotional activity of choir practice is as much as one in four, the probability that just 10 of them should have independent reasons for delay is  $(1/4)^{10}$  which is less than one in a million, while for 12 people to have independent reasons for lateness is less than one in 16 million. Thus two important questions arise. First, why is it that practically nobody used Hume's famous argument to cast doubt on *Life's* story? Second, why was the religious impact of this extraordinary event confined to only a very few people?

Through the answer to the first question, a fairly sound answer to Hume's famous objection will emerge. Some skeptics were reluctant to see a heavenly manifestation in what took place, since they were troubled by the fact that equally "deserving" individuals are only too often abandoned to their bitter fate. Why, then, should certain devout people in Beatrice, Nebraska, be singled out for such special treatment? Others, who assumed that it is inherent in the very nature of miracles not to observe any regularities, were not so much concerned by this, but instead by the problem that the deliverance of the 15 could in fact have occurred in many other ways. For instance, it

could have been that all 15 people arrived at the usual time, 7:20, and the explosion took place earlier, at 7:15. However, the church clock which was taken by everyone to be showing the right time was in fact running 10 minutes late. If any such account is correct, there is not that much room to marvel about the way the congregants escaped harm.

At the same time, the grounds for rebutting Hume should now become evident. If the choir members were inclined to give a fantastic account of their delivery, there is no limit to the number of stories they could have invented. They might have claimed that everyone arrived on time, but a few seconds before the explosion, a monstrous apparition frightened them so greatly that they all dashed outside just in time to be away from the explosion. Or they could have claimed that the support beams happened to fall precisely so as to form a fully effective shield against the falling debris, and so on, and so on. Clearly, no more than one account of their deliverance could be true, while there is an infinite scope for fictitious accounts. If the widely advertised story was not true then there is an exceedingly small probability that among the infinitely many possible stories, that particular fabrication (the purely chance synchronization of 15 people's tardiness) is going to be fed to the readers of *Life*. But if the printed story is true there was no choice about what to put in the magazine: there was no more than one true story. Thus here, as in the context of many other miracle stories, it is not the case that, as Hume claimed, we are confronted by a contest between two factors (one being more probable than the other), but between one adverse factor and two supportive factors. The credibility of the miracle story is supported first of all by the assumption that the witnesses are fairly reliable, but also by another very significant factor based on the principle that what has a larger probability is more likely to have happened than what has a smaller probability. Obviously, if the printed story was true and they wanted to make sure to give a truthful report, then the probability that it would be the printed report was one. However, if the reported story was false because the people chose to give a false report, then the probability that this particular story was going to be printed (rather than one of its million equally false and dramatic rival fabrications) was exceedingly small.

### Acknowledging Miracles

There are many more powerful examples to show that no matter how great a miracle may seem to some, others who are bent upon denying it can always explain it away. For instance we read in 1 Kings 13:6 that the wicked king Jeroboam was about to strike the Prophet, and was instantaneously punished by having his outstretched arm paralyzed. This experience shook the king up so much that he suffered a sudden onslaught of piety manifested by his humbly beseeching the Prophet: "Entreat now the Lord ... that my hand may be restored to me." The king's request was granted, and yet in verse 33 we are told "Jeroboam did not turn from his evil way." But what about the sudden paralysis, occurring precisely at the moment when the king was about to strike the holy man, and the equally swift restoration of the king's arm due to the latter's temporary repentance? Was this not a conspicuous enough manifestation of divine

intervention? We are not given any account of the king's thought processes, but we know the human mind has sufficient resources to explain away any evidence that runs counter to what it is anxious to believe.

Thus the reasonable theist will acknowledge the existence of three types of individuals: the pious, whose belief is firm enough without being given any extraordinary signs; the pliable agnostic on whom the impact of a *prima facie* miracle may have a transforming effect; and those who will insist on explaining away any miraculous phenomenon.

## Arguments for and Against

A source of serious puzzlement has been that if spectacular miracles like the splitting of the Sea of Reeds which was witnessed by over a million people and lasted for several hours are to be believed, why is it that for centuries nothing comparable has been recorded as having happened? It may be noted that this problem constitutes part of the pressure on theists to renounce their belief that such fantastic events are genuinely historical. And indeed in the last hundred years or so the denial of miracles has not been universally regarded as incompatible with theistic belief. No less a person than the Anglican bishop of Birmingham said that "miracles as they are narrated [in the scriptures] cannot in the light of our modern knowledge of the uniformity of nature, be accepted as historical." Obviously, therefore, this problem, like any other problem concerning miracles, is of interest only to believers who are not prepared to demythologize sacred literature (see Chapter 82, *Philosophical Reflection on Revelation and Scripture*).

Those theists (sometimes labeled "fundamentalists") who read the stories of the scriptures as literal reports of what actually took place may be able to meet the challenge just described. They could suggest that signs of a divinely ruled universe are evenly distributed throughout history. However those signs assume different forms, forms that are best suited to the prevailing cultural climate. This point merits elaboration.

In several papers, one of the greatest physicists of this century, E. P. Wigner, mentioned a number of phenomena which he called "miracles we neither understand nor deserve." It is only because the features of the universe he was referring to are so familiar that we fail to be astonished by them, but since they are unique in their usefulness, while their possible, unuseful alternatives are vastly more numerous, their actual presence is from an objective point of view very surprising. One of these remarkable features is that at distant places and remote epochs of time the same kind of experiments yielded the same results. Were it otherwise, the scientist's task would most likely lie beyond the powers of human intellect (Wigner 1967).

He also pronounced it simply "unreasonable," in that same famous lecture, that the imaginative creations of mathematicians, prompted by no practical need or purpose, virtually always turn out sooner or later to be of vital use to the empirical scientist. He produced some truly staggering examples, but I shall cite only the simplest one. It was known already in antiquity that the square root of  $+1$  is both  $+1$  and  $-1$ . Since there is no number which when multiplied by itself results in  $-1$ , mathematicians calmly

accepted the fact that  $-1$  does not have a square root. Consequently, the Indian mathematician's assertion that an equation like  $x^2 = -1$  is impossible to solve was universally agreed to. But then, in the sixteenth century, an Italian, Rafael Bombelli, said that though in reality there is no number to represent the square root of  $-1$ , let us *imagine* what would happen if there *was* a number  $i$  such that  $i^2 = -1$ . Thus began a new branch of mathematics dealing with imaginary numbers and their combinations with real ones, to be called "complex numbers." Within 300 years this fantasy-born branch of mathematics turned out to be a very important tool in different areas of physics. Is it not simply miraculous, Wigner asked, that ideas not rooted in any facts at all should turn out to be so much in harmony with the empirical features of the universe?

It seems natural that not everyone was thrilled with Wigner's arguments; his ideas would appear especially repugnant if "miracles" were interpreted in a religious sense, namely as divine manifestations. Michael Gullien, for instance, insisted that we should not read anything supernatural into the mathematician's imagination-spawned abstract results eventually turning out to be indispensable practical tools. He says, "The coincidence between the natural world and the mathematical world is not any more mysterious than the coincidence between the natural world and the auditory, tactile and olfactory worlds" (Gullien 1983, p. 71).

This argument rests on mistakenly regarding all our precious faculties as indispensable weapons in the struggle for survival. It is easy to see how vulnerable the human race would be to adverse forces without the capacity to hear. On the other hand, without the fascinating results of Euler, Gauss, Cantor, and other great mathematicians, though we would be much poorer intellectually and many of the fruits of advanced technology would not be available to us, the human race would still survive.

## Conclusion

An inquiry into the nature of miracles is bound to illuminate some of the broader aspects of the nature of religious faith. Believers have found a great variety of supportive evidence for their position. Among them are ancient arguments like the argument from design and more recent ones like Pascal's wager. Miraculous events are merely one kind of factor a believer may cite as testifying to the credibility of his or her position. Each one of these factors may have an impact on those susceptible to it. However, none are compelling; anyone resolutely set against the idea of theism is able to resist the power of the best argument or the most wondrous features of the universe. Hence, it is not implausible for the theist to claim that in fact there is no radical difference between different epochs in history with respect to the availability of support for the existence of a perfect being, but the form it may take is bound to vary with the particular stage of development of the human race at any given time. Pascal's wager would have been of little use, say, a thousand years ago, when people's notions of the concept of probability and of expected utilities were still confused. The implications of the many exciting features of the physical universe would have been lost on an audience even as late as the sixteenth century, when modern science was at a very early stage. Thus the sources of religious inspiration are bound to vary with the varying stages of knowledge and cultural climates.



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## Religious Experience

KEITH E. YANDELL

### Having an Experience

In the sense relevant to religion, to “have an experience” is to be in a conscious state which one is at least somewhat capable of describing. “Having a religious experience” is being in a conscious state that is *soteriologically essential* within a *religion* or *religious conceptual system*. Strictly, this is a sufficient, but not a necessary, condition for being a religious experience. But the considerations that follow will apply as well to experiences that are religious by a wider criterion.

### Religion

A religion or religious conceptual system has two essential components, a *diagnosis* and a *cure*. The diagnosis asserts that every human person has a basic non-physical illness so deep that, unless one is cured, one’s potential is unfulfilled and one’s nature cripplingly flawed. Then a cure is proffered. Having an experience is, from the perspective of a particular religious tradition, *soteriologically essential* if and only if one’s having it is (according to that religion’s proposed cure) a necessary component in being cured of one’s illness (as that tradition diagnoses it).

### Describability

Religion often is thought of as mainly about the mysterious and incomprehensible. However correct that is so far as it goes, obviously it cannot be the whole story. The claim “There is something mysterious and incomprehensible,” even if sincerely believed, does not have enough content to distinguish a religious devotee from a seeker of the Loch Ness monster or a reader of Sherlock Holmes mysteries who supposes *The Hound of the Baskervilles* to be sober history. Religions offer cures to diagnosed spiritual illnesses, and hence assume sufficient accessible knowledge to make understanding the diagnosis and the cure a possibility. This is why religious traditions tend to describe the achievement of *soteriologically essential* experiences in cognitive terms, as involving

the achievement of knowledge, enlightenment, or understanding. Religious traditions typically talk, not (or not merely) about middle-sized physical objects, but about God, Brahman, Nirvana, and the like. Insofar as God, Brahman, Nirvana, or the like are to play any role whatever in either diagnosis or cure, God, Brahman, Nirvana, or the like must be accurately describable relative to the diagnosis or cure. At least some religious traditions are ambivalent about such matters, in effect insisting on indescribability (ineffability) when under the pressure of a “how different from ourselves is ultimate reality” line but presupposing describability (effability) when pursuing a “how relevant to our deepest needs is ultimate reality” theme (see Chapter 41, Religious Language).

## Phenomenology

A phenomenological description of an experience is one given by its subject that says how things experientially seem to the subject. If Mary knowingly sees a mirage, she will not believe that she sees an oasis, but it will experientially seem to her that she does, just as it will experientially seem to her that she sees an oasis when she does. A phenomenological description will be cast in language neutral as to whether things are as they seem to the subject. The claim that Mary has an experience in which she seems to see an oasis leaves open whether there is an oasis that she sees. Phenomenological descriptions of religious experiences allow for descriptive accuracy in the absence of commitment, for or against, regarding the reliability of the experiences described.

It is important to have cross-cultural information about religious experiences. This helps one avoid conclusions that depend on the peculiarities of one particular cultural setting. The primary source for cross-cultural information regarding religious experiences is descriptions of such experiences in sacred texts, religious writings, and the like. Some scholars are deeply suspicious of such reports, believing that the experiences in question are so “contaminated” by their being reported in the sort of language native to the subject’s own religious tradition as to be worthless as reliable clues to what the experiences were really like. Other scholars take the view that the concepts and expectations learned from a subject’s religious tradition are so constitutive of her experiences that they are its creatures, produced by the tradition in question in conjunction with the subject’s needs, and thus possessed of a sort of internal uniqueness peculiar to whatever tradition or even sub-tradition she belongs to. The former sort of scholar wants to prise off the alleged conceptual overlay to see the experience in its naked form; the latter sort of scholar holds that nothing would survive the prising off process.

Each perspective has its points, and its limitations. Consider one’s consciously seeing, in imagination with one’s eyes closed, a red dot against a white background. In order to perform this modest feat, one must have the concepts *red*, *white*, *dot*, and *background*. The features of the experience that render these concepts applicable are essential to the experience; remove them and there is no experience to be had. Accessibility to these concepts is constitutive of the experience. But this need introduce no epistemological contamination; the subject who reports “I am imagining a red dot against a white background” reports accurately, even if she belongs to a strange cult in which such imaginings are alleged to yield instant immortality. If she belongs to such a cult and reports the experience by saying “I have achieved immortality,” she over-reports, going

considerably beyond her own phenomenology. Here, one can see the point of insisting that the phenomenology of the experience is accurately captured by the first report, and left well behind by the second. Even if she, upon her imagining, feels as if she has achieved immortality, a sheer report will come in some such terms as “I feel as if I have just become immortal.”

I draw two morals. No experience lacks features that make concepts applicable to it; such accessibility is an inherent feature of experiences. Being accessible to concepts is no barrier to an experience being reliable, and no reason by itself to think an experience a mere artifact of the subject and his background. These morals apply to religious experiences as much as to any others.

### Criteria for Kinds: Content

The experiences that persons have, religious or not, fall into different kinds by virtue of two different features: structure and content. Auditory experience differs from visual, tactual experience from olfactory, by virtue of content. Similarly, joy differs from guilt, awe from disgust, pleasure from pain, by virtue of content. In more general terms, aesthetic appreciation differs from moral obligation, perceiving physical objects differs from reflecting on modal logic, sadly reflecting on the current condition of the Green Bay Packers differs from remembering their glory days, by virtue of content. The *prima facie* evidence is that religious experiences differ in kind by virtue of content.

### Criteria for Kinds: Structure

Experiences also differ by virtue of structure. Feeling nauseated, dizzy, or lonely has a different structure than seeing a tree, hearing a bell, or smelling the perking coffee. The former experiences are *subject/content*; the experience’s “owner” feels a certain way. The latter experiences are *subject/consciousness/object*; the experience’s “owner” senses (or seems to sense) a particular object – a tree, a bell, or coffee. To have generalized anxiety or euphoria, panic attacks, or a headache, is to have *subject/content* experience. To be anxious about the large dog pulling at his chain, euphoric at the thought of buttermilk doughnuts, or pained by a friend’s harsh words is to have a *subject/consciousness/object* experience. The *prima facie* evidence is that religious experiences differ in kind by virtue of structure.

### Object Claims

All religious traditions make what we might call object claims. An item *O* is an object relative to Mary if and only if “Mary does not exist,” by itself or with any set of truths, *does not* entail “*O* does not exist.” God, Brahman, Nirvana, and so on, through the beings and states that various religious traditions talk about in ways centrally relevant to the diagnoses and cures they offer, are, in this sense, *objects* relative to human beings. An *object claim* asserts that some object exists or has some quality; an *experiential object*

*claim* is an object claim made by someone on the basis of some experience that he has had. A mind-body materialist will want to add to our definition of object claim some such phrase as “O is not one’s body” or “O is not one’s brain,” though I will not.

It is a consequence of this definition that, if a robust theism is true, Mary is not an object relative to God. A robust theism is true if and only if either (1) *God exists* is a necessary truth, or (2) *God exists* is a logically contingent truth, and (3) *Anything that logically possibly depends on God for its existence does depend on God for its existence* is a necessary truth. But if either (1) and (3), or (2) and (3) are true, God’s non-existence will entail Mary’s non-existence. This definition would be problematic, at least for a theist, if it entailed that Mary could not be a *creature* relative to God or Mary must be a *mode* or *state* of God rather than a *substance*. But none of these things do follow. Mary need not, in my technically defined sense, be an *object relative to God* in order for Mary to be, say, a *libertarianly free self-conscious substance* (i.e., a person). It does follow that God will not be in a position to use the principle of experiential evidence in which our notion of an *object* plays a role as part of God’s basis for knowing that Mary exists. But it would be an odd notion of divine knowledge for which that was necessary.

### Aspect Claims

An item *a* is an aspect relative to Mary if and only if “Mary does not exist,” by itself or with some set of truths, *does* entail “*a* does not exist.” God, Brahman, Nirvana, and so on through the beings and states that various religious traditions talk about in ways centrally relevant to the diagnoses and cures they offer are not, in this sense, *aspects* relative to human beings. An *aspect claim* asserts that some aspect exists or has some quality; an *experiential aspect claim* is an aspect claim made by someone on the basis of some experience that he has had.

### Relevance Conditions

Seeing my computer screen does not provide me with evidence that the next president of the United States will be a Martian; not every experience is evidence for every claim. How does one tell what the evidential potential of an experience is? The answer is fairly simple: Mary’s experience *e* provides evidence that some object or aspect exists or has some quality only if Mary’s having *e* is a matter of its experientially seeming to Mary that the object or aspect in question exists or has the quality in question. Such experiences meet the appropriate relevance conditions for such claims.

### Content, Structure, and Evidence

The structure of an experience is relevant to what it can be evidence for. Subject/aspect experiences can be non-inferential evidence for experiential aspect claims. Subject/consciousness/object experiences can be non-inferential evidence for experiential object claims.

Having an experience can provide one with evidence in favor of some claim in either of two ways. The evidence can be *direct* or *indirect*. Feeling dizzy provides direct evidence for “I am dizzy.” Were there a well-established theory, known to me as such, to the effect that *feelings of dizziness arise because of chocolate deprivation*, my feeling dizzy would provide indirect evidence for “I am chocolate deprived.” Subject/content experiences, if they provide direct evidence for anything, can provide direct evidence for claims about their owners. Subject/consciousness/object experiences, if they provide direct evidence for anything, can provide direct evidence for claims about things other than their owners. Our focus here is only on religious experiences as possible direct evidence. Obviously, what indirect evidence they provide depends on what theories are known to be well-established, and that is a large topic on its own, beyond our concerns here.

### A Modest Typology

Exactly how many basic kinds of religious experience there are, or how many subtypes fall under a given kind, is a more complex, but also less central, issue than whether there is more than a single basic kind. Given their structure and content, it is tolerably clear that there is more than one basic sort of religious experience.

There is *enlightenment experience* – *Nirvana* is central in the Buddhist traditions, *kevala* in the Jain tradition, *moksha* in Advaita Vedanta Hinduism (see Chapter 1, Hinduism; and Chapter 2, Buddhism). Briefly described in terms of their religious significance according to their own traditions, these can be characterized as follows. *Nirvana* experience is constituted by an awareness of the fleeting states of consciousness, or else of their cessation and the inner stillness that this involves. *Kevala* experience is an awareness of the abiding self that underlies our fleeting conscious states and is presupposed by, though ignored in, *Nirvana* experiences. *Moksha* experience involves an awareness of the identity of oneself with quality-less Brahman. As even these brief characterizations suggest, these experiences differ significantly in content from one another, let alone from the other proposed types. Each of them seems to be subject/content rather than subject/consciousness/object in structure.

There is *numinous experience*, which, according to monotheistic traditions, is awareness of God (see Chapter 26, Holiness). Reliable or not, it is subject/consciousness/object in structure. The subject experiences an awesome, overpowering, majestic, holy, living, personal Being who elicits awe, a sense of one’s creaturehood and dependence, and an awareness of one’s sinfulness, repentance, and worship. God may be experienced as stern judge or as loving savior. But the subject of a numinous experience does not suppose herself to be experiencing an aspect of her own being or something with which she is identical.

There is *nature mysticism*, which involves a sense of empathy with nature directed at whatever part of nature is perceptually available to the subject of the experience while she has the experience (see Chapter 83, Philosophical Reflection on Mysticism). Perhaps the greatest barrier to viewing this as a religious experience is its relative lack of a tight connection to religion conceived as a set of institutions and practices. Given attention to experiential structure and phenomenology, religious experiences seem to belong to at least three different types.



## Explanations

If Mary is having an experience (of whatever sort), there will be various sorts of explanation relevant to her doing so. Presumably her body is in some state such that, were it not in that state or in a similar one, she would not be having that experience – at least not in the particular way in which she is in fact having it. Suppose that Mary is having the experience *seeing her first gray hair*. She would not be having this experience if, for example, she had been decapitated, were brain dead, or suffered blindness; there will be physiological conditions requisite to, and to that degree physiological explanations of, her having her gray-hair experience. There will be features of her physical environment that are also requisite conditions of her having her experience; were it dark, were there no adequately reflecting surface, or were she wearing a paper bag over her head, she would not be seeing her first gray hair. Insofar as features of her physical environment are requisite conditions of her having her experience, reference to such features has explanatory relevance to her having her experience. Perhaps Mary's experience is more fully described as *seeing with horror her first gray hair* or as *seeing with delight her first gray hair*. If her experience is of the former sort, perhaps Mary has been raised in a culture that makes a fetish of youth and thinks of the un-young as ugly and worthless; if of the latter, perhaps Mary dwells in a culture in which age is associated with wisdom and authority, whereas the young are viewed as frivolous creatures not to be taken seriously. In either case, there will be sociological features that are requisite conditions of Mary having the particular experience that she has, and which thus have explanatory relevance to its occurrence. Perhaps Mary's experience is more fully described as *seeing, with resolute rebellion, her first gray hair* or as *seeing, with philosophical resignation, her first gray hair*. If her experience is of the former sort, perhaps Mary is the sort of person whose self-image is of vibrant youth and before long she will be having another experience along the lines of *noting with satisfaction that the dye has erased all traces of gray*; if it is of the latter sort, perhaps Mary views herself as one who takes what comes, accepting what is natural, and it simply would not occur to her to dye her hair. In either case, there will be requisite psychological conditions of Mary having the particular experience that she has, and which thus have explanatory relevance to its occurrence. Yet none of these explanations in any way calls into question whether Mary actually did see a gray hair on her head.

Similarly, any religious experience that a human person has will be accessible to multiple sorts of explanation. For example, a numinous experience may be so expressed that God is described as a king, a father, a mother, or a rock. God's power may be characterized by saying that God can make a camel go through the eye of a needle or as God's having a thousand arms, and divine knowledge as God's knowing the end from the beginning or as God's having a thousand eyes. A religious experience may relieve a deep anxiety, remove fear of death, provide release from a sense of guilt, give new meaning to one's life, create a sense of vocation, or function in various other psychologically significant ways. The social and political structures of one's culture, metaphors drawn from one's experience of nature and society, one's psychological needs, the ways in which persons are conceived in one's culture, and the like inevitably play a role in the descriptions a subject offers of his religious experiences. There is nothing

in this that inherently robs religious experience of whatever evidential force it might have (see Chapter 61, Naturalistic Explanations of Theistic Belief).

## The Doctrines of the Traditions

The doctrines of the traditions generally thought of as religious – including those constitutively involved in their proffered diagnoses and cures – understandably concern matters other than the immediate conscious awareness of human persons. No religion of interest could be woven from threads so thin as those provided by “I do not feel tired at the moment,” “I feel slightly nauseated,” or “I feel calm.” The same holds for experiences reported by “It is as if I were distinctionlessly united with nature” or “I seemed to be in the presence of God” unless it is somehow to be a live option that one was distinctionlessly united with nature or in God’s presence. Losing all sense of time has no religious significance unless it is a matter of *seeming to be timeless* in such a manner that what seemed so might be so. Whatever their actual status, religions do not typically purport to be systematizations of peculiar feelings or sensations – a sort of lake of data to be drained by abnormal psychology. The diagnoses and cures are supposed to be appropriate, given persons and their cosmic environment – matters plainly not limited to the feeling contents of the subjects of religious experience or to such introspectively evident features of their psyches as not feeling weary, feeling nauseous, or feeling calm. This is highly relevant when one asks what sorts of claims, if any, enjoy evidential support based on religious experience.

## The Appropriateness of Asking about Evidence

Three perspectives find questions of evidence irrelevant if not destructive. A purely secularist, opposed-to-all-religion position takes it to have been established that all religious doctrines yet offered have been shown to be false, and it is quite willing to infer that any doctrinal replacements will suffer a similar fate. Since the great work in which it was shown that all religious doctrines are false is uncommonly hard to locate – it is hard to think of any barely plausible candidates – pure secularism possesses an unfounded optimism about its status and prospects.

Fideism, secular or religious, proclaims matters of religion inherently inaccessible to issues of evidence. Fideism rests on a skepticism itself hard to support, and dubiously compatible with anyone having any reason to be a fideist. Nor, of course, is it inappropriate to ask for reasons for fideism, which is not itself a religion but a theory about religions (see Chapter 52, Fideism).

Purely pragmatic practitioners purport to care only for the psychological and physical benefits alleged to be provided by religious experiences, and evaluate such experiences only in terms of the emotional support and curative power they believe such experiences to have. While one of course can pursue a purely pragmatic approach if one wishes, it is hard to see why that possibility should get in the way of the possibility of considering questions concerning the evidential force, if any, of religious experience. Further, the very assumptions about what is beneficial, what needs to be cured or

healed, and what counts as curing or healing, are all likely to be in the same epistemological boat as the religious diagnoses and cures themselves. Are we then to adopt a second-order pragmatism about these assumptions, and perhaps a third-order pragmatism about that perspective? It seems perfectly in order to query whether a proposed cure is, even if achieved, worth the having, and whether, if so, it is accessible by the proposed means – and one may as well raise these questions at the ground-floor level. Insofar as practitioners claim any success, they make claims that immediately go beyond sheer pragmatism.

## A Principle of Experiential Evidence

A principle of experiential evidence, if it gets things right, tells us when an experience is evidence for a claim based on it. It should recognize two fundamental points: first, that things experientially seem to be a certain way is evidence that things are as they seem, at least provided we do not have reason to think the experience in question unreliable; and second, that an experience may nonetheless be unreliable. Here is one such principle:

- (P) Mary's experience *e* provides evidence for claim *c* if and only if (1) *c* is an experiential object or aspect claim made by Mary, (2) *e* meets the relevance conditions regarding *c*, and (3) Mary has no reason to doubt *e*'s reliability.

Subject/consciousness/object experiences with monotheistic content, for example, could provide evidence that God exists; subject/content experiences could provide evidence that the subject of an experience possessed certain aspects. By contrast, qualities such as *being immortal* or *being omniscient*, which are aspects of anything that has them, have this feature: one's seeming to oneself to be immortal or omniscient is no evidence whatever that one is immortal or omniscient, nor – in contrast to such features as *feeling calm* or *being in pain* – is there phenomenological content directly connected with such features. No religious experience could provide direct evidence that its subject had such aspects as *being immortal* or *being omniscient*.

Here is one way of thinking about experiential evidence: an experience *is evidence* for a claim if it is reliable and meets the requisite relevance conditions; it is *properly accepted as evidence* by one who knows the experience has occurred and that it meets the requisite relevance conditions, and who non-culpably has no reason for thinking it unreliable; an experience is *good evidence* if it *is evidence* and is properly accepted by the person who appeals to it.

Subject/consciousness/object religious experiences, then, have positive direct evidential potential regarding religious beliefs actually held within religious traditions. Subject/aspect experiences do not possess direct positive evidential potential.

## Recommended readings

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## Cumulative Cases

PAUL DRAPER

The apparent failure of traditional and other individual arguments for theism has led some philosophers to construct cumulative cases. Such cases make use of the premises of various individual arguments, but they use them in combination. Whether a successful case of this sort can be constructed is a serious question with no obvious answer. It is certainly not ruled out by logic, since combining the premises of several relatively weak (or even worthless) arguments for some conclusion can in some cases yield a good argument for that conclusion. Nor is it ruled out by religion, since the success of such a case would eliminate neither the possibility of faith nor the possibility of non-philosophical ways of knowing God. Notice also that the vast majority of well-supported theories in both science and everyday life are established by cumulative cases, not by a single argument or a single piece of evidence. Thus, if theism can (at least for the purposes of philosophical inquiry) be treated as a metaphysical theory, then the only way to determine whether a convincing cumulative case for it can be made is to actually construct and evaluate such cases.

How one might be inclined to structure a cumulative case for theism depends on what one believes are the weaknesses and strengths (if any) of non-cumulative cases for theism. If, on the one hand, one thinks that the problem with the best individual arguments for theism is that, while each establishes a part of the theistic hypothesis, each falls short of establishing the whole theistic hypothesis, then one might attempt a “distributive” cumulative case for theism. Such a case would assign to each of several individual arguments the task of establishing a different part of the theistic hypothesis. If every part of the theistic hypothesis is established by at least one argument, then such a case may succeed. If, on the other hand, one thinks that the problem with the individual arguments is that, while many of them provide some support for theism, none provides enough support to make theism probable, then one might attempt an “incremental” cumulative case for theism. Such a case would try to show that, when one adds together all of the support for theism provided by various individual arguments, the result is support for theism that is sufficiently strong to make it probable.

In this chapter, I sketch and critically discuss one cumulative case for theism of each of these two types. Although I will refer to these two cases as “my” distributive case and “my” incremental case, this should not be taken to imply endorsement. The distributive case I sketch is similar in some respects but not in others to the distributive

case defended by R. Douglas Geivett (1995, chs. 6 and 7). The incremental case I sketch resembles in some ways but in no way does justice to the sophisticated incremental case defended by Richard Swinburne (2004). In closing, I identify and very briefly sketch one example of a third more radical sort of cumulative case for theism. (See Chapter 21, *Natural Theology*, for a survey of twentieth-century cases for theism, including a number that are cumulative.)

## A Distributive Case

My distributive case for theism combines three traditional arguments: the cosmological argument, the teleological argument, and the moral argument. The role of the cosmological argument in this case is to attempt to establish that something caused the universe to exist. The teleological argument tries to show that, if the universe had a cause, then that cause is most likely a person (in the sense of an intentional agent) who vastly exceeds human persons in power and knowledge. Finally, the moral argument attempts to show that, if a personal creator of great power and knowledge exists, then that being must be the source of the objectivity of morality and of its authority over us, and so must be morally perfect.

There are, of course, many distinct cosmological arguments (see Chapter 43, *Cosmological Arguments*). My distributive case makes use of the Kalam cosmological argument, which has the advantage of being committed neither to the questionable claim that the cause of the universe is a necessary being (see Chapter 33, *Necessity*) nor to the questionable claim that contingent things that are timeless or that are infinitely old must have a cause of their existence. The Kalam argument starts from the plausible principle that whatever is finitely old has a cause of its existence. It follows from this principle that the universe had a cause of its existence, so long as the additional premise that the universe is finitely old is true.

This additional premise appears to be supported by physical cosmology (see Chapter 63, *Theism and Physical Cosmology*), though the strength of that support is debatable. Some philosophers believe that this premise can be established with philosophical argument. They argue that the assumption that the series of past events in the universe is infinite leads to paradox and hence that there must be a first event. From this and the additional premise that the universe cannot exist without events occurring, it follows that the universe is finitely old.

The second part of my distributive case makes use of the teleological argument (see Chapter 44, *Teleological and Design Arguments*). We must, however, be careful to choose the right teleological argument. For establishing the existence of a powerful, intelligent, and purposive cause of one or more instances of apparently teleological order in the universe is not enough. We also need some reason to believe that this intelligent designer is identical to the entity referred to in the conclusion of the cosmological argument. Defenders of what has come to be called “intelligent design theory” (“ID” for short) often at least implicitly question this link (see Chapter 64, *Theism and Evolutionary Biology*). In their efforts to show that ID is science and not religion, they claim that ID is neutral on the issue of whether the designer is a part of the universe or “outside” of it. To the extent that ID makes use of biological design arguments, this



seems correct. Consider, for example, one of the ID advocates' favorite arguments from design, the one based on the alleged "irreducible complexity" of certain biochemical systems. No defenders of this argument claim that all terrestrial biological systems are irreducibly complex. And no responsible defenders of this argument deny that unguided evolution is capable of producing reducibly complex systems. Thus, it is conceivable that some of our systems – the irreducibly complex ones – have been intelligently designed by other natural intelligent beings who themselves contain only reducibly complex systems and thus who themselves could easily be the product, not of design, but of completely unguided evolution.

This is why a "cosmic" teleological argument like the fine-tuning design argument seems better suited than biological design arguments for my distributive case for theism. According to the fine-tuning argument, certain physical parameters of the universe are "fine-tuned" for life in the following sense: their numerical values fall within a range of values known to be "life-permitting" that is extremely narrow when compared to the range of values that are known to be "life-forbidding." These parameters include the constants in some of the laws of physics and also some of the initial conditions of the universe (e.g., the rate of expansion of the universe just after the hypothetical time of the big bang). This sort of fine-tuning appears to support the claim that, if the universe had a cause of its existence, then that cause is probably a powerful and intelligent person who fixed the values of these parameters for the purpose of creating life. Of course, it is possible that the cause of the universe and its "designer" are two distinct entities, but this is unlikely, since no intelligent being that determines the constants in the laws of physics and the initial conditions of the universe could be a product of that universe. And the existence of a single supernatural entity that both causes and designs the universe is more likely than the existence of two supernatural entities that are jointly responsible for creation. Thus, it is reasonable to identify the designer of the fine-tuning design argument with the entity that, according to the Kalam argument, caused the universe to exist.

My distributive case for theism, if successful so far, has shown that a person possessing enormous power and knowledge probably created (i.e., caused and designed) the universe. This by itself, however, is compatible with deism as well as theism. The crucial part of the theistic hypothesis that is still missing is that the person who created the universe is morally perfect (see Chapter 30, Goodness). Notice that this crucial component cannot be inferred from what we know about the good and evil in the world; for ours is a world that contains not only horrific undeserved suffering, but also countless sentient beings, including humans, that either strive but fail to flourish or that flourish briefly before facing inevitable decay and death. This is hardly the sort of world one would expect a morally good (let alone morally perfect) creator to make (see Chapter 59, The Evidential Problem of Evil). Thus, some other sort of argument is needed if we are to reach a theistic instead of a deistic conclusion. Perhaps the most promising candidate to fill this gap is the moral argument (see Chapter 45, Moral Arguments). Again, there are many different sorts of moral arguments. Most of these arguments fail partly because they try to establish the truth of theism all by themselves. They tend to leap from the (alleged) implausibility of naturalistic explanations of morality to the truth of theism, as if theistic explanations of morality were obviously plausible and as if there were no other options besides theism and naturalism. The following moral

argument is designed specifically for my distributive case – that is, it is designed to build on the foundation provided by the cosmological and teleological arguments.

The argument begins with the premise that there would be no substantive moral truths if there were no minds. This is supported by three facts. First, substantive moral statements do not appear to be necessary truths or groundless contingent truths. Second, they do not appear to supervene on ordinary physical facts. And third, legal and other non-moral obligations depend for their existence on (human) minds. What is puzzling, however, about morality, is that, unlike, say, law or etiquette, it is objective in a very strong sense of the word. It appears that the truth or falsity of certain moral judgments (e.g., that torturing dogs for entertainment is morally wrong) does not vary from person to person or from culture to culture and could not be altered by human beings no matter what they do. This strongly suggests that the source of moral obligation, unlike the source of legal obligation or rules of etiquette, cannot be human minds. Further, if the source of morality is a mind, then morality could not have the sort of authority it has over us if that mind were morally flawed or if that mind's moral goals could be thwarted by some other more powerful being. Therefore, if the cosmological and teleological arguments establish the existence of a powerful person who created the universe partly for the purpose of bringing human beings into existence, then that being is in all likelihood the morally perfect ground of morality.

Distributive cases like mine must clear some high hurdles to succeed. For one thing, every individual argument they employ must successfully establish *at least* the probable truth of its conclusion. The multiple serious objections that have been raised to cosmological, teleological, and moral arguments make this hurdle very high indeed. Another hurdle that distributive cases must clear is that reasons must be given for thinking that the various conclusions of the individual arguments that make up the case all refer to the same entity. I have attempted to state such reasons in my distributive case, but they are an additional source of uncertainty, which brings me to a third hurdle for distributive cases. Because distributive cases like mine are typically not formulated in explicitly probabilistic terms, they hide certain uncertainties in the various individual arguments, uncertainties that are themselves cumulative in the sense that they may spell disaster for the case as a whole even if they do not undermine any of the individual arguments that make up that case. For example, the conjunction of the premises of the cosmological argument is (for more than one reason) at best probably true, not certainly true. Thus, although the argument is deductively valid, it does not establish more than the probable truth of its conclusion. Such uncertainty is even more obvious in moral arguments, which rely on intuitions about morality that may themselves exist only because, historically speaking, our moral concepts and beliefs have developed either in cultures where most people believed in one or more gods or in cultures heavily influenced by such cultures. Further, even if the inference in the teleological argument is correct, it is not deductively valid, and the key probability judgment in the argument seems to rely for its justification on the notoriously unreliable principle of indifference. Finally, doubt about whether the three conclusions of the arguments all refer to the same entity increases the uncertainty of the overall case. Even ignoring this last source of uncertainty, these multiple uncertainties present a problem partly because, from the fact that each argument establishes the probable truth of its conclusion, it does not follow that the three arguments combined establish

the probable truth of theism – i.e., of the conjunction of their conclusions. (Analogously, the next card I randomly draw from a standard deck will probably not be a diamond, and will probably not be a spade, and will probably not be a club; yet surely it would be unwise to conclude that it will probably be a heart!)

## An Incremental Case

Incremental cases avoid some of the obstacles that distributive cases must overcome, but they face their own obstacles. In developing his incremental case, Swinburne makes a useful distinction between a correct “p-inductive” argument and a correct “c-inductive” argument (2004, ch. 1). In a correct p-inductive argument, the conjunction of the premises does not entail the conclusion, but it does make the conclusion probable. A correct c-inductive argument is only a “correct argument” in an extended sense of that term. For such an argument only raises the probability of its conclusion. It does not by itself make that conclusion probable. Swinburne’s strategy for constructing an incremental cumulative case is to combine several good c-inductive arguments for theism, arguing that together they constitute a good p-inductive argument.

This sounds more straightforward than it is. One problem is that, from the fact that  $x$  raises the probability of theism and  $y$  raises the probability of theism and  $z$  raises the probability of theism, it does not follow that the conjunction  $x \& y \& z$  raises the probability of theism by some “cumulative” amount. Indeed, it does not even follow that it raises the probability of theism at all! Fortunately, this problem is easy to solve. Without going into the mathematical details, the basic idea is that, if  $x$  raises the probability of theism relative to no (contingent) background knowledge at all, and  $y$  raises it relative to our knowledge of  $x$ , and  $z$  raises it relative to our knowledge of  $x \& y$ , then it does follow that the conjunction  $x \& y \& z$  raises the probability of theism by an amount that is cumulative.

My incremental case will appeal to the following five propositions, each of which reports some (allegedly) known fact about the world:

- A: A complex universe exists.
- B: That universe has multiple free physical parameters that are fine-tuned for life.
- C: Conscious life exists in that universe.
- D: Some of these conscious beings are moral agents – i.e., they have morally significant freedom of the will.
- E: Some of these moral agents have powerful religious experiences apparently of God.

In order to argue that a fact  $f$  raises the probability of theism relative to background knowledge  $k$ , Swinburne makes use of the so-called relevance criterion of confirmation, which states the following:

$$\Pr(h \text{ given } f \& k) > \Pr(h \text{ given } k) \text{ if and only if } \Pr(f \text{ given } h \& k) > \Pr(f \text{ given not-}h \& k).$$

This says that the probability of a hypothesis  $h$  given some fact  $f$  and background knowledge  $k$  is greater than the probability of  $h$  given  $k$  alone (i.e., roughly,  $f$  raises the

probability of  $h$ ) if and only if the probability of  $f$  given  $h$  and  $k$  is greater than the probability of  $f$  given  $k$  and the falsity of  $h$  (i.e., roughly,  $f$  is more to be expected or less surprising if  $h$  is true than if it is false). For example, the fact that Smith's fingerprints are on the safe raises the probability that he stole the money relative to the background knowledge that he has no legitimate access to the safe if and only if his fingerprints are antecedently more likely to be on the safe on the assumption that he stole the money and has no legitimate access to the safe than on the assumption that he did not steal the money and has no legitimate access to the safe. Notice that we can make comparative judgments of probability like this even if we cannot assign specific numbers to the probabilities in question.

Proposition A reports the fact that a complex universe exists. In arguing that this fact raises the probability of theism, I will borrow heavily from Swinburne (2004, ch. 7). Swinburne claims that the existence of a complex universe is to be expected on theism because God would have good reason to create what he calls "humanly free agents," by which he means embodied agents (whether human or not) of limited power, knowledge, and freedom who make morally significant choices and are responsible for those choices. Such agents could not exist in a simple physical universe, which shows that a complex physical universe is what one would expect given theism. Given atheism (i.e., the denial of theism), however, the physical universe may very well have no cause at all. Thus, since complexity demands a cause in a way that simplicity does not, one would expect the universe to be very simple if there is no God. Therefore, the complexity of the universe is evidence for theism in the sense that it raises the probability of theism. Further, because a complex universe is many times more probable given theism than it is given atheism, it follows that the complexity of the universe is *strong* evidence for theism, not in the sense of making theism probable all by itself, but in the sense of raising manyfold the ratio of the probability of theism to the probability of atheism (which is still compatible with theism being less or even much less probable than atheism).

Now consider B, the fact that several free physical parameters are fine-tuned for life. (Roughly, a physical parameter is "free" if current physical theory does not show that it had to have the value it does have.) If a theistic God has a reason to make finite free agents, then such fine-tuning is not surprising given theism (conjoined with A). Given atheism, however, it is rather remarkable that all free physical parameters have values that fall within ranges known to be life-permitting, especially since, for several such parameters, that range is extremely narrow compared to the range of values that are known to be life-forbidding. Thus, we have a second strong c-inductive argument for theism.

C, D, and E add more evidence for theism. For surely consciousness is more likely to emerge in a physical universe on the assumption that theism (conjoined with A and B) is true than on the assumption that atheism (conjoined with A and B) is true. And given that a complex fine-tuned universe containing conscious beings exists, the fact that some of these beings are moral agents who make morally significant free choices is far more probable given theism than given atheism (see Chapter 46, Arguments from Consciousness and Free Will), or at least this is the case if moral agency has great value in spite of the fact that it can lead to moral evil. Finally, there is good reason to believe that a good God would want to reveal herself to us (see Chapter 60, Divine Hiddenness).

Thus, while it is possible that experiences apparently of God are all delusory, the mere fact that they exist is (relative to A through D) more likely if there is a theistic God than if there is not.

This cumulative case is *potentially* very powerful, partly because of the way that the support for theism accumulates. If, for example, each of these five c-inductive arguments for theism by some coincidence increases the ratio of the probability of theism to the probability of atheism precisely  $n$ -fold, then it follows that all five together increase this ratio  $n^5$ -fold. In other words, the cumulative strength or combined force of the five c-inductive arguments is equal to the product, not the sum, of the strengths of the five individual arguments. Unfortunately, incremental cases for theism of this sort face at least three kinds of problems that threaten to be their undoing: the problem of priors, the problem of alternatives, and the problem of total evidence.

To appreciate the problem of priors, recall that “evidence that supports theism” means, in this sort of incremental case, “evidence that increases the probability of theism.” But that presupposes some starting or prior probability that can increase. If this prior probability is low enough, however, then not even very strong evidence of this sort will make theism more probable than not. In other words, without the right priors, the good c-inductive arguments will not when combined constitute a good p-inductive argument. This is a problem because it is notoriously difficult to assign a prior probability to theism and to justify that assignment. Swinburne tackles this problem head on, arguing that theism is a relatively simple hypothesis and thus does not have a negligibly low prior probability (2004, ch. 5). Alvin Plantinga (2007) argues that theism has a high prior probability because it is “natural” to believe in God. Currently there is no widely accepted view about how to assess prior probabilities. One very popular view is that they are subjective. If that view is correct, then the success or failure of an incremental case like mine might vary from one person to another.

The problem of alternatives is equally difficult to solve. Notice that each of the c-inductive arguments for theism involves comparing the probability of some fact given theism to the probability of that fact given the denial of theism (which we have been calling “atheism”). The problem of alternatives is that there are many possible world-views compatible with the falsity of theism, including various forms of naturalism, pantheism, panentheism, deism, and polytheism, to mention a few (see Chapter 1, Hinduism; Chapter 2, Buddhism; Chapter 40, Pantheism; and Chapter 75, Reincarnation and Karma). Indeed, there are no doubt additional possibilities that have never been considered and perhaps never could be considered by human beings because of our cognitive limitations. How, then, to assess the probability of some fact given the denial of theism? In practice, atheism is usually equated in arguments like these with naturalism. But unless some justification is given for that (e.g., in terms of the relative prior probabilities of the various alternatives), incremental cases like mine fail to establish their conclusions.

Finally, incremental cases like mine (and distributive cases as well) appear to violate the requirement of total evidence. For they appeal only to facts that appear to raise the probability of theism, while ignoring facts that appear to lower it. To Swinburne’s credit, he does try very hard to show that what we know about evil in the world does

not lower the probability of theism (2004, ch. 11), but he doesn't seem to take seriously other apparently negative evidence. Often, this other evidence is just a more specific fact about the same topic as the general fact that appears to support theism.

For example, even if Swinburne is right that theism is supported by the general fact that the universe is complex, one should not ignore the more specific fact, discovered by scientists, that underlying this complexity is a much simpler early universe from which this complexity arose, and also a much simpler contemporary universe at the micro-level, one consisting of a relatively small number of different kinds of particles, all of which exist in one of a relatively small number of different states. In short, the complexity of the universe that we experience with our senses can be explained by two sorts of simplicity within the universe. Given that a complex universe exists, this more specific fact is exactly what one would expect on atheism, or at least on naturalism, because, as Swinburne says, the complexity of the universe cries out for explanation in terms of something simpler. There is, however, no reason at all to expect this more specific fact on theism since, if Swinburne is right in thinking that theism is a relatively simple hypothesis, then theism already provides a simple explanation of the complexity of the universe.

Or consider the existence of consciousness. No doubt its existence is evidence for theism. But we know a lot more about consciousness than just that it exists. We also know, thanks in part to the relatively new discipline of neuroscience, that conscious states in general and even the very integrity of our personalities, not to mention the apparent unity of the self, are dependent to a very high degree on physical events occurring in the brain. Given the general fact that consciousness exists, these more specific facts are expected on naturalism, while on theism, it would not be surprising at all if our minds were more independent of the brain than they in fact are. After all, if theism is true, then at least one mind, God's, does not depend at all on anything physical. Thus, when the available evidence about consciousness is fully stated, it is far from clear that it significantly favors theism (see Chapter 65, *Theism and the Scientific Understanding of the Mind*).

Similar problems threaten to undermine appeals to fine-tuning, moral agency, and religious experience. Fine-tuning is impressive, but given this fine-tuning it is more surprising on theism than on naturalism that our universe is not teeming with life, including life much more impressive than human life. Moral agency is also predicted by theism better than by naturalism, but given its existence, the variety and frequency of conditions that severely limit our freedom seem more likely on naturalism. Finally, experiences apparently of God are no doubt more to be expected if God exists than if there is no God, but various facts about their distribution are more likely on naturalism, such as the fact that many people never have them and the fact that those who do have them almost always have either a prior belief in God or extensive exposure to a theistic religion.

Much more could be said about this on both sides. For the purposes of this chapter, however, understanding the general structure of the objection is more important than determining whether it ultimately succeeds. The objection is this: All of the individual c-inductive arguments in my incremental case appear more significant than they really are because they *understate* the available evidence. By this I mean that they successfully



identify some general fact about some topic that is more probable given theism than given naturalism, but all too conveniently ignore other more specific facts about that topic, facts that, *given the general fact*, are significantly more probable in naturalism than in theism. More vaguely, it appears that, when it comes to evidence concerning theism, the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away.

### An Emergent Case?

Notice that distributive and incremental cumulative cases assume that there is “something right” about individual arguments for theism in spite of their failure to establish that the theistic God exists or even that such a God probably exists. Many philosophers believe, however, that individual arguments for theism have nothing going for them at all – they do not strongly support any significant part of the theistic hypothesis, they do not weakly support the whole theistic hypothesis, and they do not even weakly support any significant part of the theistic hypothesis. Even this view, however, is compatible with there being a viable cumulative case for theism. For from the fact that no part of theism is supported even weakly by any of the facts to which individual arguments for theism appeal, it does not follow that the conjunction of those facts does not strongly support theism. In other words, when it comes to evidential support, the whole can be much greater than the sum of its parts (even when those parts sum to zero). Cases for theism of this sort can be called “emergent” cumulative cases. I am not sure that anyone has ever *explicitly* defended an emergent case, though Basil Mitchell’s (1981 [1973]) cumulative case for theism is arguably intended to be emergent. In the remainder of this entry, I will very briefly describe one kind of emergent case. There may very well be others.

With the exception of ontological arguments (see Chapter 42, Ontological Arguments), traditional and other individual arguments for theism can be treated as abductive arguments or “inferences to the best (available) explanation.” Understood in this way, it is arguable that each fails. The explanandum, whether it is complexity of one sort or another, morality, consciousness, religious experience, or free will, is in each case better explained by naturalism than by theism, partly because theism is so much more extravagant, metaphysically speaking, than naturalism. Typically, these naturalistic explanations are reductive or even eliminative. Thus, there is a sense in which the phenomenon in question, or at least the phenomenon interpreted robustly, is explained naturalistically by being explained away. Thus, the mental is either eliminated as illusion (a postulate of naive folk psychology) or it is reduced to the physical. Free will is either eliminated as illusion (more folk psychology) or it is reduced to something compatible with causal determinism. Morality is either eliminated as illusion (a product of selfish genes ensuring their own survival by deceiving their hosts) or it is reduced to something subjective or culturally relative. Fine-tuning is either eliminated as illusion (free physical parameters will not be free when we discover the true fundamental laws of physics from which their values all follow) or it is reduced to a byproduct of multiple universes and observational selection. The naturalistic explanation is in each case better than the theistic explanation because of its metaphysical modesty – other things being equal, it is better to subtract by elimination or reduction than to add



a supernatural person to one's ontology, especially since naturalistic explanations have successfully replaced supernaturalist ones so many times in the past (see Chapter 62, *Historical Perspectives on Religion and Science*).

It does not follow, however, from the fact that theism is not the best explanation of any member of some set of facts, that it is not the best explanation of the conjunction of the members of that set. Reductive and eliminative explanations are fine up to a point. The more phenomena one attempts to explain (away), however, the less good those explanations appear when looked at cumulatively. At some point, metaphysical extravagance combined with a world that in multiple respects is really how it appears to be beats metaphysical modesty combined with a world that is not at all similar to how it appears. This is partly because every reduction or elimination of some phenomenon in which we are naturally disposed to believe makes us or should make us less confident in our cognitive faculties. If a worldview requires us to explain away too many phenomena, phenomena that our cognitive faculties tell us are real, then we must reject that worldview because believing it is ultimately self-defeating: believing it leads or should lead to doubting the reliability of the very cognitive faculties that generate our worldviews. If for reasons like this naturalism is ultimately self-defeating, then a cumulative case for theism may *emerge*.

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- Craig, W. L. *The Kalam Cosmological Argument* (London: Macmillan, 1979). (A rigorous and yet very readable defense of the Kalam argument.)
- Goetz, S., and Taliaferro, C. *Naturalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008). (A cumulative case against naturalism.)
- Schellenberg, J. L. *The Wisdom to Doubt: A Justification of Religious Skepticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007). (A powerful cumulative case for religious skepticism.)
- Sorley, W. *Moral Values and the Idea of God: The Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of Aberdeen in 1914 and 1915*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921); available online at <http://www.archive.org/stream/moralvaluesidea00sorrich>. (A classic defense of the moral argument.)

PAUL DRAPER

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## Pragmatic Arguments

JEFFREY JORDAN

As with so much in philosophy, the first recorded employment of a pragmatic argument is found in Plato. At *Meno* 86b-c, in response to the paradox of the knower, Socrates tells Meno that believing in the value of inquiry is justified because of the positive impact upon one's character:

*Meno*: Somehow or other I believe you are right.

*Socrates*: I think I am. I shouldn't like to take my oath on the whole story, but one thing I am ready to fight for as long as I can, in word and act – that is, that we shall be better, braver, and more active men if we believe it right to look for what we don't know than if we believe there is no point in looking because what we don't know we can never discover.

*Meno*: There too I am sure you are. (Plato 1961)

Socrates' point is if being better, braver, and more active are among our desires, and if believing that inquiry is permissible facilitates our becoming better, braver, and more active, then we have pragmatic reason to believe that inquiry is permissible. Socrates' argument is an argument in support of cultivating a certain belief. Pragmatic arguments are practical in orientation, justifying actions that are thought to facilitate the achievement of our goals. If among your goals is A, and if doing such and such results in your achieving A, then, all else equal, you have reason to do such and such:

- a1. doing  $\alpha$  helps to bring about  $\beta$ , and
- a2. it is in your interest that  $\beta$  obtain. So,
- a3. you have reason to do  $\alpha$ .

There are two kinds of pragmatic arguments having to do with the action of belief formation (see Jordan 2006, pp. 39–42). The first is an argument that recommends taking steps to believe a proposition because, if it should turn out to be true, the benefits gained from believing that proposition will be impressive. This first kind of pragmatic argument we can call a "truth-dependent" pragmatic argument, or more conveniently a "dependent-argument," since the benefits are obtained only if the relevant belief is true. The prime example of a dependent argument is an argument that uses a calculation of expected utility and employs the expectation rule to recommend belief:

In a decision situation where both probability and utility values can be assigned, one should choose to do an act which has the greatest expected utility.

Pascal employs this rule in his best-known version of the wager: no matter how small the probability that God exists, as long as it is a positive, non-infinitesimal probability, the expected utility of a theistic belief will dominate the expected utility of disbelief.

The second kind of pragmatic argument, which can be called a “truth-independent” pragmatic argument, or more conveniently, an “independent-argument,” is one which recommends taking steps to believe a certain proposition simply because of the benefits gained by believing it, whether or not the believed proposition is true. This is an argument that recommends belief cultivation because of the psychological, moral, religious, or social benefits gained by virtue of believing it. In David Hume’s *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, for example, Cleanthes employs an independent argument, “religion, however corrupted, is still better than no religion at all. The doctrine of a future state is so strong and necessary a security to morals that we never ought to abandon or neglect it” (Hume 1779, p. 219). Perhaps the best-known example of an independent argument is found in William James’ celebrated “Will-to-Believe” argument in which he argues that, in certain circumstances, it is rationally and morally permissible to believe a proposition because of the benefits thereby generated.

Unlike independent pragmatic arguments, dependent ones are, in an important sense, truth-sensitive. Of course, being pragmatic arguments, dependent arguments are not truth-sensitive in an evidential sense; nevertheless they are dependent on truth since the benefits are had only if the recommended belief is true. In contrast, independent pragmatic arguments, yielding benefits whether or not the recommended beliefs are true, are indifferent to truth. Independent arguments, we might say, are belief-dependent and not truth-dependent. And notice that the benefits may involve the good of others, and even the common good. Thus, pragmatic arguments cannot be easily dismissed as nothing but selfish appeals to base considerations.

## Pascal’s Wager

The most celebrated example of a dependent pragmatic argument is due to the French philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623–62).

Let us examine this point and declare: “Either God is or He is not.” But to which view shall we incline? Reason cannot decide this question. Infinite chaos separates us. At the extremity of this infinite distance a game is in progress, where either heads or tails may turn up. How will you wager? ... Let us weigh the gain and the loss involved by wagering that God exists. Let us assess the two cases: if you win, you win all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Do not hesitate then, wager that He does exist. (Pascal 1670, pp. 150–1)

There are at least three different versions of the wager found in the complete *Pensées* passage (see Hacking 1972; McClennen 1994; and Jordan 2006). One version, which might be called a *weak dominance* argument, can be paraphrased so:

One cannot lose when wagering on the existence of God, rather than against. In the event that God exists, one who believes does very well; in the event that God does not exist, one who believes does no worse than one who does not believe.

The idea of this argument is that the one wagering in favor of God existing will, by believing, in no case be in a position worse off than one who does not. The one who wagers against, however, will in some cases be worse off. A weak dominance argument has a “sure-thing” appeal: one cannot lose by wagering in favor of God existing (see Pascal 1670, pp. 150–1).

A second version adds probability values to the wagering context, which allows a calculation of expected utilities:

If the probability of God existing is equal to that of God not existing, and given that the utility of theistic belief, if God exists, is infinite, then the expected utility of believing swamps that of disbelief.

The key point of this version is that, since the expected utility of disbelief is, presumably, finite, theistic belief will always be recommended (see Pascal 1670, p. 151).

A third version of the wager, and perhaps the best-known version, does not presuppose an equiprobability between God existing and not existing:

As long as there is some positive probability that God exists, it follows, since infinity multiplied by any finite amount generates an infinity, that the expected utility of believing that God exists swamps that of disbelief.

The idea here is that no matter how small one takes the odds to be that God exists, believing that God exists carries an infinite expected utility (see Pascal 1670, p. 151).

Pascal's wager is not an argument that God exists. The wager is an argument that it is rational to form the belief that God exists. Rationality is understood here as a kind of prudential rationality as opposed to what could be called epistemic rationality. Prudential rationality concerns what is in one's interest, while epistemic rationality is strictly connected to evidence. The distinction between prudential rationality and epistemic rationality is a more general form of the distinction made above between pragmatic arguments and truth-directed arguments.

One objection to the wager is a partitioning complaint: the wager, as it is framed, neglects all sorts of relevant alternatives. Possible religious hypotheses include not just the existence of the Christian God, but also the existence of the Islamic God, and the god of the Druids, and even that deity, if such should exist, who would grant eternal life to atheists and condemn to perdition all who believe in a deity. Indeed, given the cooked-up hypothesis just mentioned, we could come up with any number of incompatible god-possibilities, each condemning the devotees of every other deity to perdition. This objection to the wager is called the “many-gods objection” and the point of it is that the wager proves too much: given a possible infinite utility and a positive probability, no matter how small, an infinite expected utility is generated. Hence, the wager, instead of singularly recommending a religious hypothesis to believe, seems to

recommend any number of incompatible religious hypotheses, each with an infinite expected utility, and no obvious way to choose among them.

The friend of the wager has at least two ways of dealing with this embarrassment of Pascalian riches (see Jordan 2006, pp. 73–101). The first is to deny that mere logical possibility entails a positive probability. Or, to put the point another way, when calculating probabilities it is common and proper to ignore remotely small probabilities. Consider flipping a fair coin. We say it's fifty-fifty heads or tails, even though there are other possible occurrences: the coin might land on its edge, it might vanish, it might transform into an elephant, and so on. This point holds even if we accept the notion of an infinite utility since when deliberating whether to take an umbrella or not, we ignore the vanishingly small possibility that doing so, or not doing so, could generate an infinite disutility.

A second way of saving Pascal's partitioning of the alternatives is to limit the relevant choices to "live hypothesis" only. A live hypothesis is any proposition not thought to be false and is such that one could believe it without extensive and far-reaching revisions in one's web of beliefs. A live hypothesis can be accommodated more easily than one which is not. The restriction to live hypotheses only entails a person-relativity – a hypothesis live to one person may not be so for another. Understood this way, the wager would be a last step in an apologetic case rather than the first: once the relevant alternatives have been narrowed down to theism and naturalism, the wager is a tie-breaker that recommends theistic belief.

A second objection to the wager involves the wager's use of infinite utilities. The problem here is twofold: what sense, if any, can be made of the idea of an infinite utility; and can standard, axiomatic decision theory accommodate infinite utilities?

The key to understanding Pascal's contention that theistic belief carries, if true, an infinite utility is to remember that, according to Christian theology, life in heaven is an endless, sublime existence of which each succeeding moment of existence is as saturated in happiness as each preceding one (see Chapter 74, Resurrection, Heaven, and Hell). Since such an afterlife is unending, summing to infinity as it were, it is not too much of a stretch to term this mode of existence an infinite gain. It is a payoff which surpasses any finite good. Is the idea that there are infinite utilities compatible with standard axiomatic systems of Bayesian decision theory? It is not. The introduction of infinite utilities will generate problems with several of the axioms found in the standard constructions. Is this an intractable problem for the Pascalian? Probably not. For one thing, there is no construction of decision-theory which is without controversy. For another, it is not surprising that theories constructed for finite utilities cannot accommodate infinite ones. Moreover, remembering that the wager is protean, the Pascalian can point out that rational decisions can be framed independent of the standard axiomatic theories, especially since the Pascalian can present the wager argument in any of its several guises, being limited to neither any one version of the argument nor, apart from the concept of an infinite utility, dependent upon any controversial decision-theoretic principles. Indeed, versions of the wager shorn of the infinite are possible, although uncommon (see Jordan 2006, pp. 123–6).



## Other Prominent Pragmatic Arguments

Another example of a pragmatic argument is the “Will-to-Believe” argument of the American pragmatist William James (1842–1910). According to James, there are occasions in which it is rationally and morally permissible to believe a proposition, even in the absence of adequate evidence supporting that proposition (see James 1897, p. 11; see also Chapter 15, *American Pragmatism*).

It is important to notice that James does not endorse the idea that one can properly believe a proposition despite the evidence against it. In the essay “The Will to Believe,” James specifies two conditions that must apply before one can properly believe a hypothesis, James’ term for a proposition, that lacks adequate evidence (see James 1897, pp. 2–4). The first condition concerns the evidence for or against a proposition. According to James, whenever a proposition’s truth or falsity cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds, it is intellectually indeterminate. A proposition is intellectually indeterminate in either of two ways. The first includes situations in which the evidence, pro and con, is balanced. This would be a case of epistemic parity: a tie between the evidence pro and con. The second way occurs when there is no evidence known, whether evidence against the proposition or evidence in support of it. The two ways can both be understood as involving intellectual indeterminacy in either an in-principle sense or an in-practice sense, and James’ argument can use either sense of indeterminacy. The first condition is, then, that the proposition be intellectually indeterminate.

The second condition concerns what James would call a “genuine option.” An option is a choice concerning which of two propositions to believe and it is genuine just in case it involves a choice which is living, momentous, and forced. An option is living whenever the choice involves propositions that are real possibilities of belief. For example, whether or not to be a theist is probably a real possibility for most Westerners; but the option of being a Druid or not is so remote a possibility that it is dead. Momentous options are those choices upon which something of great importance depends, or are choices which are irreversible once made, or are singular opportunities that are unlikely to be repeated. A forced option obtains whenever one cannot avoid making a decision by suspending judgment. With regard to any proposition the choice of whether to believe that proposition true or false is avoidable: one can suspend belief regarding its truth value. However, if some significant consequence can be had only if one believes a certain proposition, then the choice of whether to believe that proposition or not is forced. If one can receive  $x$  only by believing that  $p$ , then whether or not to believe that  $p$  is forced: if one suspends judgment toward  $p$ , one will not receive  $x$ .

The principle endorsed by James can be stated thus:

for any person  $S$  and proposition  $p$ ,  $S$  can permissibly believe  $p$  if  $p$  is (i) intellectually indeterminate, and (ii) is part of a genuine option. (James 1897, p. 11)

Notice that this principle is compatible with the rule that one should believe a proposition if that proposition has the support of evidence in its favor. The normative concept

involved in James' principle is best understood as including both rational and moral permissibility.

The application of James' principle to philosophy of religion is as follows. The religious option, according to James, consists of two claims. The first is that what is best or supreme is eternal, and the second is that we are better off even now if we believe the first claim (James 1897, pp. 25–6). Though vague, the idea, expressed differently, is that God exists and, if we believe, we are the immediate recipients of assurance and hope and other beneficial states of mind. And, according to James, the option of whether to believe the religious option or not is living, momentous, and forced – in a word, a genuine option. Moreover, the evidence, pro and con, is indeterminate. From this it follows that the religious believer is well within her intellectual rights by believing that God exists.

James' argument provides us with an example of an independent pragmatic argument. James, unlike Pascal, is not gambling on the truth of the claim that God exists. James is banking that theistic belief provides immediate benefit. There is also a hint in James, which is not developed fully, that it is only by first believing that one will have any real chance of discovering decisive intellectual evidence concerning the existence of God. Believing in the absence of adequate evidence may be, this idea goes, necessary in order to get oneself a perspective from which additional evidence is obtainable (see James 1897, pp. 24–5, 27–8; and Wainwright 1995). If something like this is correct, then the chasm between prudential rationality and epistemic rationality is, at certain points, bridgeable.

In his posthumously published essay, "Theism," J. S. Mill (1806–73) proffers two adoptive pragmatic arguments in support of the legitimacy of hoping that an attenuated form of theism might be true. The first of Mill's two pragmatic arguments is similar to James' argument, though unlike James, Mill neither carefully crafts the circumstances in which it is permissible to adopt a positive stance toward theism, nor believes that one can permissibly believe religiously. Mill advocates the adoption of hope toward the doctrines and ideals of theism. Like James, Mill is clear that it is permissible to invoke pragmatic considerations only in the absence of strong evidence contra theism (see Mill 1874, p. 81).

Mill's second pragmatic argument is that theistic belief serves the important function of motivating morality:

There is another and a most important exercise of imagination which, in the past and present, has been kept up principally by means of religious belief and which is infinitely precious to mankind, so much so that human excellence greatly depends upon ... it. This consists of the familiarity of the imagination with the conception of a morally perfect Being, and the habit of taking the approbation of such a Being as the *norma* or standard to which to refer and by which to regulate our own characters and lives. (Mill 1874, p. 82)

Mill does not argue that religious belief is logically necessary for moral reasoning, but he does argue that religious belief has historically facilitated moral motivation. Religious belief provides a moral heuristic and an ideal, both of which render moral reasoning more concrete and more accessible. So, according to Mill, although there is not enough evidence to render religious belief rationally permissible, one can hope that theism is

true and this hope will provide the same benefits that religious belief historically provided (see Mill 1874, pp. 82–7).

## Pragmatic Arguments and the Ethics of Belief

There is a widespread and influential tradition found in Western philosophy, a tradition that we can call “evidentialism,” which holds that

for all persons *S* and propositions *p*, it is permissible for *S* to believe that *p* only if *p* is supported by adequate evidence.

Endorsing this evidentialist imperative, many philosophers have held that pragmatic reasons for belief-formation are illegitimate since such reasons do not themselves provide adequate evidence for the truth of the belief (for more on evidentialism, see Conee and Feldman 2005 and Chapter 80, Evidentialism). Perhaps the most-quoted statement of the evidentialist imperative is that of W. K. Clifford (1845–79): “it is wrong always, everywhere, and for any one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence” (Clifford 1879, p. 186). Clearly enough, Clifford formulated the evidentialist imperative in a moral sense: it is morally impermissible to believe something which lacks sufficient evidence. The normative sense of the imperative can also be understood in a cognitive sense: to believe something lacking sufficient evidence is irrational. Understood either way, is the evidentialist imperative an obstacle to a principled use of pragmatic arguments?

It is far from clear that it is. For one thing, the evidentialist imperative is at most a *prima facie* obligation. And if the evidentialist imperative is a *prima facie* obligation, then it is possible, if the pragmatic considerations were to override the epistemic ones, that a use of pragmatic arguments would be compatible with the evidentialist imperative.

Moreover, depending on the precise sense of *adequate* used in the imperative and remembering both Pascal’s second version of the wager and the “Will-to-Believe” argument of James, pragmatic arguments can be used even if the evidentialist imperative is one’s actual duty. As long as pragmatic arguments are employed only when a situation of evidential parity exists, there will be no violation of the evidentialist imperative since the pragmatic arguments are employed merely as tie-breakers.

In addition, pragmatic belief formation could be one’s moral duty. This is evident in what we might call the stranded alpine hiker case:

A hiker, because of an avalanche and a blinding blizzard, is stranded on a desolate mountain path facing a chasm. The hiker cannot return the way he came because of the avalanche, yet if he stays where he is, he will freeze as the temperature plummets. The hiker’s only real hope is to jump the chasm. Knowing that exertion generally follows belief the hiker realizes that his attempt will be half-hearted, diminishing his chance of survival, unless he brings himself to the belief that he can make the jump (adapted from James 1895).

The hiker is morally justified in forming beliefs motivated by pragmatic reasons, and in suppressing other beliefs (“I cannot make the jump”), again motivated by pragmatic

reasons. And if it is true that no one is irrational in doing one's moral duty, then pragmatic belief-formation is sometimes both morally and intellectually permissible.

Or consider counterexamples to the evidentialist imperative drawn from studies in medicine. Research has shown a correlation between the level of reported pain (felt pain) and one's expectation of the pain. In short, if one anticipates a painful event, the felt pain is higher than if one lacks that expectation (Vase et al. 2003). Or consider well-recognized placebo effects in which the expectation of the disappearance of pain is instrumental in its disappearance (Wall 2000). Parents often tell their children that removing the Band-Aid won't hurt much, doing so with the hope that the felt pain is thereby reduced. Clearly, if there is a general duty to reduce suffering, one would be obligated to form beliefs or to inculcate beliefs in others if doing so would lower the level of pain. Or think of sports psychology. Since exertion generally follows belief (a theme often invoked by James), much of sports psychology involves inculcating beliefs that lack adequate evidentiary support. By believing that one can make the play, one is more likely to make an optimal effort. Having the belief that one will succeed often helps bring it about that one does. These considerations cast doubt on the evidentialist imperative.

Finally, some philosophers have argued that the evidentialist imperative, though venerable, is in sore need of revision. In particular, some have argued that pragmatic reasons can supplement epistemic reasons in determining whether it is rational to believe a proposition. This idea is based upon the distinction between (1) a proposition being rational to believe, and (2) believing being the rational thing to do. Although a particular proposition may not be rationally believable, it could be, nonetheless, that believing that proposition is the rational thing, all things considered, to do. In this way the acquisition of a particular belief can be rationally mandated by either (1) or (2), depending upon the circumstances and the person involved (see Nozick 1993, pp. 64–93). If this proposal is correct, then the distinction between epistemic rationality and prudential rationality is narrowed once again.

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## Tradition

BASIL MITCHELL

The concept of tradition has had a secure place in Christian theology and a controversial status in modern philosophy.

### Tradition in Christian Theology

A religion such as Judaism or Christianity which is based upon a past revelation requires that the deposit of faith can be transmitted from one generation of believers to another in a reliable form. If the original revelation is enshrined in scripture it needs to be interpreted and its limits defined. This requirement could be avoided only if the revelation was held to be so clear and specific that it could be recognized and understood by anyone at any period without an intermediary of any kind. Otherwise there is need for a continuing body which would be responsible for maintaining the tradition in its authentic form and would have authority to settle disputes about its interpretation. The individual believer would depend upon this body and the tradition it mediates for his or her understanding of the faith. Hence it would be natural for the Church to take tradition entirely for granted and to regard it as a source of religious truth along with reason and scripture.

Given the close association of tradition with ecclesiastical authority it is not surprising that it has given rise to a great deal of controversy. The insistence on continuity of doctrine and organization is common to the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican communions, but they have differed as to where the authority for tradition is located and, to some extent, as to its content. The Reformation witnessed a widespread rejection of the hitherto accepted *magisterium* of the Roman Catholic Church, but generated further disagreements as to whether the authority now lay in some other ecclesiastical agency or was vested in the entire community of believers or in the individual conscience. It was also a matter of dispute how far tradition could be a source of new insights. Protestants, including Anglicans, insisted that tradition should be derivable from scripture (see Chapter 82, Philosophical Reflection on Revelation and Scripture), whereas the Roman Catholic Church was prepared to allow "unwritten traditions" which may be authorized by the Church if not inconsistent with scripture and if supported by a consensus of theologians.

Disputes about tradition have been accentuated by fresh developments in the modern period. The critical study of the Bible made simple reliance on the text of scripture more

problematic. This in itself brought tradition into greater prominence, but the same critical methods applied to Christian origins called into question the processes by which Christian doctrines had been formulated. It was, for example, possible to ask whether the Greek philosophical concepts employed in the formation of the creeds were appropriate for the God of the Hebrew Bible. Modernists began to question the extent to which the hitherto accepted tradition was mandatory for contemporary Christians who had access to scholarly resources not available in earlier centuries. Scripture and tradition were indeed essential to an adequate understanding of the faith, but they needed to be tested against reason and experience.

## Tradition and the Philosophers

It is only comparatively recently that questions about tradition have been addressed by philosophers. Modern philosophy, both rationalist and empiricist, began by repudiating ecclesiastical authority and with it the claim that tradition is a source of knowledge (See Chapter 12, Early Modern Philosophical Theology on the Continent; and Chapter 13, Early Modern Philosophical Theology in Great Britain). Even those philosophers who, like René Descartes and John Locke, were themselves religious believers were convinced that, as philosophers, they must rely on reason and experience alone. The thinkers of the Enlightenment tended to associate theological authority with dogmatic obscurantism and followed Descartes in seeking to construct their philosophy upon a foundation of clear and distinct ideas. Whether these were *a priori* or derived from experience, they possessed a self-evidence which rendered appeal to tradition otiose. Nor was ecclesiastical authority the only kind to be questioned. The rising scientific movement also sought to free itself from the authority of Aristotle.

In these developments Locke was a representative figure. He sought to establish the existence of God by rational argument and appealed to the witness of prophecy and miracle to show that God had revealed himself in propositions which were above reason but not contrary to it. The argument is addressed entirely to the individual and has no place for tradition or the Church as the repository of it. Of the four sources of religious truth – reason, scripture, tradition, and experience – Locke accepts only the first two, since in his contempt for “enthusiasm” he rejects religious experience as well as tradition (see Chapter 48, Religious Experience).

The emphasis on reason which is common to both the critics and the defenders of religion in the period of the Enlightenment became associated with a powerful concept which militated strongly against any appeal to tradition, namely autonomy, which found its classical expression in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. The individual bore responsibility for his or her beliefs and it was incompatible with one's integrity as a rational being to defer to any kind of authority. Hence deliberately to align oneself with a tradition was to abdicate from the status of a rational agent. This notion of autonomy is perhaps more definitive of modernity than any other, so that even when, under the influence of the Romantic movement, the claims of reason had been modified or abandoned, the demands of autonomy had been, if anything, reinforced. The typical modern hero is free, independent, and lonely. For him or her to identify with an inherited tradition would be to incur *mauvaise foi*.



## Newman's Vindication of Tradition

The thinker who did the most to vindicate the role of tradition against these influences was both philosopher and theologian. John Henry Newman's approach was primarily philosophical. His principal target was Locke (see Locke 1959 [1690]), whom he criticized for his failure to recognize the role in our thinking of antecedent assumptions. Locke assumed, as did all thinkers of the Enlightenment, that if someone's beliefs are to be rationally defensible they must be based on evidence which is presently available to him or her and can be specified and produced on demand. Moreover, the degree of confidence reposed in them must be strictly proportionate to the strength of the evidence. Viewed from this standpoint a historical tradition may indeed be a means of preserving evidence which might otherwise be lost, but it can possess no other claim to rational authority. Newman held that this account was plainly incompatible with the way people actually think. All of us – and not only religious believers – are influenced, and rightly so, by antecedent assumptions which derive from some tradition of thought or practice on whose resources we draw whether we acknowledge it or not. It is simply not the case that we approach the evidence with an entirely open mind. "Antecedent assumptions" cover a whole range of things: theories or systems of thought which are taken for granted, the concepts and attitudes which go with them, and the language in which they are expressed. Newman also insists that when our convictions about matters of importance are at stake, the arguments we use are informal and cumulative so that it is not a straightforward matter to set out the evidence to which we appeal or to articulate and assess the inferences we employ (see Newman 1890, pp. 215, 274).

Newman's arguments, as we shall see, had implications beyond the sphere of theology. But, in theology and in conjunction with his case for the development of doctrine, they provided a defense of the role of tradition in Catholic Christianity against philosophical criticism. They did not, however, resolve the dispute between modernists and traditionalists.

Modernists need not oppose the appeal to tradition in principle, as Newman has interpreted it; their concern was about how to conduct it in the light of current investigations into the Bible and Christian origins. Once the Bible was seen to be a collection of writings of different periods and various genres, the need for help in interpreting it became increasingly apparent. Nevertheless, the Church's own traditional interpretation was itself open to criticism when the political and philosophical influences upon it were recognized. Tradition was necessary, but it was not sufficient. It was legitimate to ask how far Christian doctrine, as it was formulated by the Fathers, was derivable from scripture and what was the continuing authority of the historic creeds as promulgated by the early Church. Given that modernists were prepared to respect the role of tradition, the way was open to them to seek to modify the accepted teaching of the Church without altogether undermining its foundations. They could even argue that it was traditional to do so – if tradition was properly understood. Attention must be paid to tradition as an indispensable guide to Christian truth without its being regarded, in its inherited form, as wholly mandatory for the contemporary believer.

Similarly, Newman's argument made it possible for the *magisterium* to defend its accepted role against Enlightenment critics without incurring the charge of being merely an irrelevant survival.

The most uncompromising form of the appeal to tradition, developed in conscious opposition to the modernists, was to be found in the decisions of the First Vatican Council of 1870. The sole repository of valid tradition was the *magisterium* of the Roman Catholic Church, as indeed the Church has always maintained, but now it was held to be centered in the papacy, so that Pius IX was able to declare "I am tradition." This conclusion was held to follow logically from the premise that God had given humankind a definitive revelation of himself. If this was to be effective it was necessary that it should be transmitted from one generation to another by a body which had the authority to determine the canon of scripture and to interpret it correctly under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which Christ had promised would lead the Church into all truth. Moreover, to ensure that the declarations of this body could be trusted, it must be acknowledged to be infallible.

Such a strong conception of tradition, although logically coherent, had difficulty responding to criticisms based upon historical and literary research, and thinkers within the tradition of faith, both Catholic and Protestant, set out, not to repudiate the tradition, but to revise it more or less radically. Aware of advances in historical scholarship and of the variety of influences upon the development of doctrine, they argued that mistakes had in fact been made and that the tradition had from the start been more fragmented than it had been made to appear. Greek conceptions of a timeless perfection had, for example, been allowed to distort the biblical picture of a God active in history. The job of the contemporary theologian was not to reproduce the formulations of previous ages but to interpret Christian doctrine in a way that best reflected the Christian message in the light of the full tradition of the Church and whatever relevant knowledge was now available which was not possessed by earlier Christians. This "hermeneutic" task was one which was capable of being pursued successfully in the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but was not guaranteed against error. Reason, scripture, and experience had all three a part to play in monitoring the tradition.

It is evident that in the continuing debate between more liberal and more conservative adherents of tradition a good deal depends on what the findings of critical study of the Bible and the history of the Church are actually thought to be. Is there sufficient agreement on essentials between Christian thinkers at any given time, and between them and their successors, to justify the claim that there exists and has existed a single coherent tradition of which a defensible contemporary version could be given? Or must we be content to acknowledge an irreducible plurality?

This is not in itself a philosophical issue, but, as we shall see, philosophical contentions have been invoked in relation to it.

## Philosophical Problems about Tradition

The idea of tradition has in Western thought been associated primarily with Christian belief and practice. It is only comparatively recently that it has been acknowledged by philosophers as having a role to play in secular as well as religious systems of thought,

an acknowledgment which has served to reduce the isolation of theology from the mainstream of Western philosophy.

It is worth noting, to begin with, that Newman's critique of Locke and the Enlightenment is not sufficient in itself to vindicate the role of tradition in revealed religion. He succeeds in refuting the view that judgments must be formed solely on the basis of evidence currently available, and confidence in them strictly proportionate to it, but this serves only to show that the solitary thinker inevitably depends to some extent upon a continuing tradition. It does not have to be unchanging, so long as it does not change too rapidly. T. S. Eliot in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (see Eliot 1932) insists that the writer of genius transforms the tradition to which he belongs and may, presumably, change it radically. Newman's conviction that the tradition of Catholic Christianity is substantially true and that, if properly interpreted, it represents the same truth now as when originally delivered cannot rest solely on his recognition that any system of belief rests on some tradition or other. It requires in addition some defensible account of the identity of a tradition in terms of which the original deposit of faith can be held to retain its meaning through time. Some radical theologians deny the possibility of this on philosophical grounds. In their view the project of restating traditional Christian doctrine in contemporary terms is impossible to achieve, not or not only because of the insufficiency or untrustworthiness of the factual evidence, but because it is logically flawed. It presupposes what is not the case – that it is possible for a twentieth-century thinker to understand and assent to the thought-forms of an earlier age. If this view is accepted, the only way of maintaining Christian identity is by reliance on the continuing authority of the Church as an institution, which is held to have the same relationship with God now as in time past, although inevitably conceptualizing it quite differently.

The further question arises of how the acceptance of tradition can be reconciled with the ideal of autonomy. So long as the individual's identification with a tradition is only provisional, it may be said, freedom of inquiry is not threatened. It may be necessary to start from some traditional standpoint, but subsequent thought may lead one to modify the tradition or abandon it in favor of another. But this is not possible if the thinker is committed to a creed which has been formulated once and for all. No doubt, if such commitment is understood weakly as an undertaking to treat traditional beliefs seriously, to examine them carefully to see if they provide valuable insights, etc., then reason is not compromised; but if the commitment is wholehearted, it can only be at the expense of that free and impartial review of a case which is a precondition of rational inquiry. To adhere to a tradition in this sense is to have a closed mind.

One way of dealing with this problem is to challenge the underlying assumption that reason is a faculty which can stand aside from a tradition and assess it from a critical standpoint in principle available to all (see MacIntyre 1981, pp. 206–7). If, on the contrary, criteria of meaning and standards of rationality are themselves intelligible only within a tradition, it is not possible to judge the tradition itself in its entirety. Autonomy is exemplified in the act of will by which the individual adheres to a tradition or acquiesces in it.

The question then arises of how, if at all, it is possible to make a rational choice between traditions. As it is often put, "there is no neutral ground on which to stand."

Reason is no longer able to moderate tradition, because in the last resort it is dependent upon it (see MacIntyre 1988, pp. 393–4).

It remains to consider how far the traditional relationship in Christian theology among scripture, tradition, reason, and experience can be coherently stated. What conditions would have to be satisfied to enable each to have its due in the face of philosophical criticism?

First, tradition would need to be shown to have preserved truths which can be derived from scripture or are consistent with it, and scripture itself must have a sufficient degree of coherence. Inconsistencies and differences of emphasis must not be so great as to rule this out. It would be a matter of judgment how much variety is compatible with essential unity.

Second, it must be possible for a tradition to remain substantially true to its origins. That is to say, it must be possible to rebut the kind of philosophical relativism which challenges any claim to believe what thinkers of some previous age believed.

Third, the aim of keeping the tradition up to date must be realizable. That is to say, it must be open to criticism and capable of being modified in response to it without forfeiting its essential identity. It must be possible, in principle, to decide between rival interpretations of the tradition.

Fourth, criticism must be possible; reason must not be definable solely by reference to the tradition itself.

Finally, it must be possible in principle to assess the claims of the tradition as against rival traditions, however difficult this may be in practice.

Whether these conditions can in fact be satisfied is a controversial issue in theology and the philosophy of religion. The claim that they cannot is characteristic of a radical strain in theology and corresponding positions in the philosophy of science and the philosophy of history. The claim that they can be satisfied makes sense of the disputes which regularly occur between conservative and liberal theologians. Conservative theologians who attach importance to tradition – who are not, that is, Biblical fundamentalists – look for certainty in religious truth and argue that it can be secured only if the Church as *the* repository of tradition is guaranteed against error. The tradition must be safeguarded by a continuing institution whose role is, indeed, supported by reason, but whose deliverances are open to criticism only within rather narrow limits. Liberal theologians maintain that the Christian tradition has always been subject to controversy, which is a condition of growth, and by risking error allows fuller understanding. The Church should look not for an unattainable certainty but for a reasoned faith of the sort that is characteristic of the human situation. The guidance of the Holy Spirit is itself a postulate of such a faith.

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## Fideism

TERENCE PENELHUM

Philosophical defenders of faith have commonly tried to show that it is not at odds with reason: that it is internally consistent, that it accords with scientific knowledge, or even, more positively, that some of its tenets can be established independently by philosophical reasoning. Fideists reject one or more of these modes of argument, and maintain, in contrast, that faith does not need the support of reason and should not seek it. Such rejection can take moderate or radical forms, since the concept of reason is so multifaceted.

### Moderate and Radical Fideism

Although this understanding of what fideism is has become reasonably stable among philosophers, the term “fideism” entered scholarly discourse through the work of nineteenth-century French theologians who sought a way of insulating faith from Enlightenment attacks. Their work was deemed unacceptably modernist by mainstream Catholic theology, which remained predominantly Thomist (see Chapter 20, Thomism). The pejorative tone that the term acquired from this has made theologians and philosophical apologists reluctant to accept it as a suitable name for their own positions, as distinct from those of classical thinkers.

Two recent apologetic viewpoints are examples of this. One is Reformed epistemology (Plantinga 1983; see also Chapter 22, *The Reformed Tradition*; and Chapter 79, *Reformed Epistemology*). This rejects the evidentialist assumption that faith is only rational if independent, non-theistic grounds can be offered for it (see Chapter 80, *Evidentialism*). Its adherents are not thereby committed to more radical fideistic doctrines such as the impossibility of natural theology (see Chapter 21, *Natural Theology*). Another such position is what Kai Nielsen (1967) has called Wittgensteinian fideism: the view that religious discourse has its own logic that can only be appreciated by a participant, and must not be judged by criteria derived from other kinds of discourse or confronted by questions about the existence of God (see Chapter 19, *Wittgenstein*; Chapter 76, *Theological Realism and Antirealism*; and Chapter 77, *Wittgensteinian Philosophy of Religion*). Both these viewpoints, while questioning traditional supports of faith, emphasize that faith has, or is, its own form of rationality. So it is necessary to be cautious about claiming where fideism, in its moderate form, begins.

There is, however, no doubt what some of its radical versions tell us. We find (in Tertullian and Søren Kierkegaard) the view that any proper understanding of faith shows that it inevitably generates paradoxes. We find (in Kierkegaard) the view that faith is prudentially and morally foolish. Although claims like these place faith in opposition to reason, it is important to recognize that they can still be argued on philosophical grounds. To claim that faith cannot make rational sense is analogous to the claim that morality cannot be justified by the criteria of rational self-interest, even though many philosophers have tried to give it credentials by arguing that it can. It is a consequence of such a view that the transition to faith from a life lived hitherto without it cannot be a reasoned transition but only a “leap” from one mode of personal being to another – a rebirth.

A fideist, then, will hold that faith does not need, or does not manifest, some form of rationality, and will proclaim this in its defense. Most commonly the fideist will hold that faith does not meet standards of evidence or proof, but may go further and maintain that its proclamations are paradoxical. In both its moderate and its radical form, fideism will involve the denigration of reason as a source of spiritual truth and will find grounds in the nature of faith for holding that reason’s support is a liability rather than an asset.

### Fideism and Skepticism

If this understanding of the fideistic tradition is sound, it is not hard to see why it has shown an otherwise strange affinity for skepticism. The skeptic claims to expose fundamental weaknesses in the power of reason to lead us to knowledge of reality, and such claims are readily seen by the fideist as opening the way to faith by undermining philosophical attempts to establish it in the wrong way. Hence the phenomenon, striking in the early modern era, of *skeptical fideism*.

Skeptical fideism took two forms. Some fideists sought to present faith as a non-dogmatic acceptance of traditional conventions and practices, much as the Pyrrhonists of antiquity abandoned the philosophical search for truth and acquiesced in the local pieties of their culture. I have elsewhere called this *conformist fideism*; it is to be found (at least intermittently) in Michel de Montaigne and Pierre Bayle. Other fideists, recognizing that the enervating conventionality of the conformist stance is deeply at odds with the commitment of real faith, see the skeptic as an unwitting ally who exposes the pretensions of reason so that faith can then step in and fill the spiritual gap the skeptic has helped to create. We find this position, which I have called *evangelical fideism*, in Blaise Pascal and in Kierkegaard. The arguments I shall examine here are all to be found in their writings. Only some of them depend on the concessions they make to skepticism. (See Pascal 1966; Kierkegaard 1941 and 1985; and Penelhum 1983.)

### Some Key Fideist Arguments

The core of fideism is the insistence that faith is not a mere matter of assent to doctrines, but a state of trust and commitment of which the object is God himself, not a series of propositions about him. The obstacle to faith in each of us is a sinful self-centeredness



that makes us reject the signs of God's presence that he has revealed to us. While faith is the only cure for human ills, humans have elected to use their intellectual powers to seek a cure on their own. Reason requires an objectivity and detachment that is appropriate in science but is an evasion of the passionate involvement required to attain salvation. Faith requires rebirth and submission. Without these, God's presence will remain hidden from us.

These arguments do not show the undesirability of attempts to support faith by argument. The implied censure of the motives of philosophers who have attempted this may fit the attitudes of René Descartes and G. W. F. Hegel, who were the models of rationalism for Pascal and Kierkegaard, but they do not fit those of Anselm or Thomas Aquinas. The intellectual objectivity necessary for the consideration of philosophical arguments no more shows the pridefulness of those who engage in them than the detachment of medical researchers shows them not to care for healing. It is indeed true that faith and intellectual assent cannot be equated; but this does not show that the trust and submission of faith cannot follow from a recognition of God's reality and love, and that these cannot be shown to be realities by the intellect. And if it is true that the barrier to faith is pride and sinfulness, these would not show that God's reality and love could not be proved to us by argument: only that if they were, we would exercise our freedom in the wrong way and refuse to concede that they had been. In fact, the existence of proofs of God would help to show that unbelief was indeed due to sin, since only some form of willful self-deception could explain why those to whom his reality was demonstrated refused to concede it. Failing this, unbelief would always have another excuse. This last also shows that the skeptic is not the real ally of faith, since if skepticism is true then unbelief could be explained by our intellectual incapacity as well as by our wickedness.

In short, if it is indeed human corruption that keeps us from God, it is more likely to be manifested in our refusing to concede the cogency of arguments in faith's support than in our laboring to create them.

In addition to arguments based on the supposed motives of a philosophical search for God, Pascal and Kierkegaard maintain that failure in such a search is inevitable because of God's hiddenness. This theme is perhaps the most enduring legacy of fideism, although recent discussions of it suggest it is an apologetic liability (see Schellenberg 1993 and Chapter 60, *Divine Hiddenness*). Pascal holds that God discloses himself when he chooses, and that the signs of his presence are clear to those who earnestly seek him, but not to those hindered by their unwillingness to acknowledge him. Kierkegaard, in his parable of the prince who woos the humble maiden (see Kierkegaard 1985), tells us that God enters history in a way that seeks a loving response from his creatures. Since revealing himself in his full power and glory would overwhelm us and elicit a response based on fear or self-interest, he must necessarily appear in disguise, as a humble servant. While their views differ importantly, they concur in saying that there can be no clear sign of God for those who do not turn to him for rescue from their corrupt condition. There can be no signs that reveal God unambiguously. In Kierkegaard's language, faith not only requires passionate commitment, but a commitment in the face of objective uncertainty.

But if God hides himself from any of his creatures because of their corruption, he may hide himself from them even if there are phenomena that prove his reality

conclusively: for their corruption would prevent their heeding the clear implications of these phenomena. If the signs are indeed inconclusive, then this very fact would give those who are confronted with them a reason for conscientious hesitation. (This is a necessary truth.) While it is true that an overwhelming manifestation of God's presence would take away his creatures' freedom and lead to responses based on fear, there is no reason to suppose that every phenomenon that placed his presence beyond reasonable doubt would have to be overwhelming. Not all miraculous occurrences need be overwhelming, and certainly philosophical demonstrations would not be. The claim that God must be hidden because if he were apparent, even to the intellect, our freedom to respond to him in loving submission would be taken away, confuses the epistemic requirements of proof with other circumstances that have attended some major revelatory events. And the fact that it would, in some circumstance, be perverse or unreasonable to say no to a sign or an argument does not show that human beings do not have the freedom to say no in spite of this. Our very ability to be unreasonable in this way is surely one of the manifestations of the corruption in our natures.

The classic fideistic arguments against the use of philosophical reasoning in apologetics are therefore weak ones, even though the fideist is right to emphasize that faith in God is far from identical with assent to the conclusion of an argument. While the demands of faith make it understandable that arguments for God should encounter widespread rejection, they do not make it necessary that they should be probative failures. If they are probative failures, this rather constitutes a *problem* for the apologist, for whom it should be puzzling that doubters have good reason for their hesitations.

## Radical Fideism

There are two views of the "leap" of faith. While the moderate fideist, like Pascal, will hold that faith and philosophical reasoning are incompatible in their motives and the truths of faith are beyond the power of reason to attain, the radical fideist tells us that faith is flatly contrary to reason, involving those who have it in the passionate espousal of paradox and the active flouting of reason's canons. Tertullian, Bayle, and Kierkegaard insist that Christian proclamations, most notably those of the Incarnation and the Trinity, do not merely look paradoxical but must genuinely be so, and that the believer must knowingly brush aside the claims that reason makes when faith confronts it. Tertullian, notoriously, said that he believed not although, but because, it was absurd. Bayle says there is a religion of the heart as well as of the head, and that one must believe even though the light of reason teaches that what one believes is false. Kierkegaard argues that Christian faith is doubly paradoxical: the divine act of Incarnation that the believer acknowledges is paradoxical; and the acknowledgment of it, which involves a leap of acceptance in the face not merely of inadequate evidence but of sheer contradiction. This presents a logical scandal that resists all the attempts of rationalizing apologists to domesticate it.

It is hard for the philosopher to respond to radical fideism, since the radical fideist seems to reject all the rules to which a philosopher can appeal. The fideist seems on the surface to have chosen to accept the claims of one authority and to have brushed aside

the protests of another: to have decided to treat the urgings of his or her own intellect as though they are like the urging of those residual sinful desires that faith helps believers to overcome. But this appearance is deceptive.

There is no logical difficulty in the suggestion that one might hold, even with passion, some doctrine that is self-contradictory, yet not realize it. But consciously living inconsistency is another matter. If I myself think that something I believe is truly paradoxical, then, although I may indeed come to believe it from a variety of causes (perhaps including an encounter with someone I think has divine authority), I will also have come to believe in its falsity. I will then have a conflict of beliefs. To say that I have come to embrace it wholeheartedly in all its paradoxicality is to say that I do not, after all, have the belief in its falsity with which the belief in its truth is contending in my psyche. The radical fideist evinces an inner conflict but maintains verbally that it is resolved. One cannot resolve such a clash by denying its presence. One can, of course, over time, weaken, and even extinguish, one of the competitors (through inattention, compartmentalization, or sheer recitation of its contrary), but in this case that would necessarily mean that one no longer judges the faith-commitment to be paradoxical. To say before that happens that one has chosen faith over reason is to indulge in a self-deceiving denial of an inner conflict that is bound to continue as long as the consciousness of reason's negative judgment does. That the conflict is less than agonizing in some people (that the passion is a happy one) merely shows that self-deception can be successful. For all its insistence on the spiritual purity of faith, radical fideism is a form of false consciousness.

### Parity

There is an important argument that both Pascal and Kierkegaard use, which I have elsewhere, called the *parity argument* (Penelhum 1983). As found in their work, it includes the skeptical premise that many commonsense beliefs share with faith the feature that they are beyond rational justification. If this is so, the situation of faith is no worse than that of many secular forms of belief, and they should be recognized to involve faith also. (Kierkegaard speaks of secular faith as well as religious.) This argument, in spite of appearing in many facile forms in popular preaching, is fundamentally a sound one: there is an obvious inconsistency in dismissing faith as irrational merely because of the fact (if it is one) that it involves a leap beyond evidence in the way that perceptual or inductive beliefs are thought to. But in spite of the soundness of the argument as an apologetic maneuver, it can be, and has been, detached from its fideistic connections. The analogy between religious beliefs and those dependent on perception or memory or induction is a staple of Reformed epistemology, where the skeptical overtones are eliminated: it is now maintained that just as these secular beliefs do not need the independent support of philosophical argument to be properly classified as rational, or even as forms of knowledge, the same is true of those beliefs that form the cognitive core of faith. The analogy is used as an argument for holding that the evidentialist criteria of rationality are too narrow. It could well be maintained that the appeal of fideism derives from assuming the correctness of these

criteria and then reacting in the wrong way to their implications. (It can also be noticed that once these criteria of rationality are abandoned, there is no reason to reject any independent philosophical support for faith that natural theology might offer, since it need not be offered as a guarantee of faith's reasonableness, but only as an additional sign of its truth.)

## Faith and Practical Reason

Discussions of faith and reason usually center on how far faith conforms or should conform to standards of cognitive rationality. But the fideist tradition also has things to say about how far the life of faith conforms to standards of practical rationality.

Pascal tells us that faith is God known by the heart, not the reason, and (more famously) that the heart has its reasons that reason does not know. But the passage in the *Pensées* that has always engaged the philosophers' attention is the wager argument, in which Pascal urges a serious but unbelieving reader to recognize the advantages of faith over unbelief as a way of minimizing the risks one runs in the face of eternity (see Chapter 50, Pragmatic Arguments). This is a clear appeal to prudence (and is based on the stated assumption that there are no better theoretical grounds for belief than for unbelief). Pascal urges his unbeliever to adopt various devices to induce belief in himself in spite of the absence of convincing grounds for it. Pascal's critics think this appeal compromises the spiritual purity of any belief that could result from it. However, Pascal's understanding of faith is not thus compromised. For the unbeliever is urged to take steps that might lead to faith; it is no part of Pascal's case that someone following this prudential course already has it. We may assume that if genuine faith were to result from the course of action Pascal recommends, the prudential motive will have been replaced. On the other hand, it is true that by using this argument Pascal has emphasized one form of rationality that can assist faith's emergence; we can suppose that even if similarly impure motives (such as curiosity) might inspire thinkers to study the cognitive credentials of faith, they too could be succeeded by a faith that was sustained by quite different motives.

Are those other fideists right who suppose that faith itself does not satisfy the standards of practical rationality? Notoriously Kierkegaard thinks this. He believes faith to be a passion; his panegyrics on Abraham, the paradigm of faith, emphasize that his unanxious response to the command to sacrifice Isaac is unintelligible to prudential and to moral reason (Kierkegaard 1983). But it is not obvious that someone who has come to think that the claims of the faith are true, or even, less definitely, that there is some degree of likelihood that they are true, should not respond passionately to this, and should not have his or her life transformed by this. For we judge passions, and the lives based on them, as being foolish or wise in the light of how the person who feels them and lives them is responding to the truth as he or she perceives it. And given what believers come to believe, or even think may be likely, faith and personal transformation may well be fully reasonable responses. The caricature of faith as a passionate and wholehearted certainty about matters that are uncertain is a deeply mistaken one. Fideism, unfortunately, has helped create and perpetuate it.

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## Part VI

# Challenges to Theistic Belief

## The Presumption of Atheism

ANTONY FLEW

This presumption is not that presumptuous insolence of which, at the beginning of the final book of *The Laws* (885A), Plato accuses those who dare to disbelieve in “the existence of the gods” and in their salutary and inflexible interventions in human affairs. Here the presumption of atheism, like the presumption of innocence under the English common law, is a principle prescribing who should bear the burden of proof. Whereas the presumption of innocence stipulates that accused persons shall be presumed to be innocent until and unless their prosecutors have succeeded in proving them guilty, the presumption of atheism stipulates that it is up to believers in the existence and activities of the gods or of God to provide good reason for believing rather than to unbelievers to provide positive reasons for not believing.

To perfect the parallelism the word “atheist” has in the present context to be construed in an unusual way. Nowadays it is normally taken to mean someone who explicitly denies the existence and activities of God as conceived within the three great Mosaic traditions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. But here it has to be understood not positively but negatively, with the originally Greek prefix “a-” being read in the same way in “atheist” as it customarily is in such other Greco-English words as “amoral,” “atypical,” and “asymmetrical.” In this interpretation an atheist becomes not someone who positively asserts the non-existence of God, but someone who is simply not a theist. The former may be distinguished as the positive sense of the term and the latter as the negative.

It is important to notice that this class of negative atheists embraces some members who cannot properly be described as, in the modern understanding, agnostics. In this understanding agnostics have already conceded that there is, and that they have, a legitimate concept of God such that, whether or not this concept does in fact have actual application, it theoretically could. But negative atheists, unlike positive, have not as such necessarily conceded even this. Indeed the class of negative atheists includes as perhaps its most intellectually stimulating sub-class that of all those who have never encountered the concept in question, and who therefore require some account of how it can be introduced and can be shown to be coherently applicable.

We may distinguish three elements of analogy between the presumption of atheism and the presumption of innocence. The first is that in both of these contentions about the burden of proof the word “proof” is being used in the ordinary, wide sense in which



proofs embrace any and every variety of sufficient reason. It is not limited to the sort of deductive, demonstrative proof in which the conclusion proved cannot be denied without thereby contradicting at least one of the premises.

In the article of the *Summa Theologiae* immediately preceding that in which St Thomas Aquinas claimed that “there are five ways in which one can prove that there is a God” (I.2.3), he certainly did maintain that this is something which “can be demonstrated” (I.2.2). But, equally certainly, he did not mean this in the narrowest sense of “demonstrated.” It was no doubt in order to avoid possible confusion there that when the First Vatican Council of 1870–1 proclaimed as an essential dogma of the Roman Catholic faith that “the one and true God our creator and lord can be known for certain by the natural light of human reason” (Denzinger 1953, sect. 1806), the words “can be known for certain” replaced the reading “can be demonstrated” of an earlier draft (see Chapter 21, Natural Theology).

A second element of positive analogy between these two presumptions is that both are defeasible; and that they are, consequently, not to be identified with assumptions. The presumption of innocence indicates where the court should start and how it must proceed. Yet the prosecution is still able, more often than not, to bring forward what is in the end accepted as sufficient reason to warrant the verdict “guilty,” which appropriate sufficient reason is properly characterized as a proof of guilt. Were the indefeasible innocence of all accused persons an assumption of any legal system, then there could not be within that system any provision for any verdict other than “not guilty.” To the extent that it is, for instance, an assumption of the English common law that all citizens are cognizant of all which the law requires of them, that law cannot admit the fact that this assumption is, as in fact it is, false. The presumption of atheism is of course similarly defeasible and requires no assumption of atheism whether positive or negative.

The third element in the positive analogy is a perhaps paradoxical consequence of the second. Because these are not assumptions but contentions about the burden of proof, that people succeed in proving what they are thus challenged to prove does not even begin to show that the burden was wrongly placed upon their shoulders. Yet although such contentions make no disputatious assumptions but are concerned only with proper procedures, their acceptance or rejection can nevertheless produce very substantial differences in the eventual outcomes.

To adopt a presumption about the burden of proof is to adopt a policy. And policies have to be assessed by reference to the objectives and the priorities of those for whom they are proposed. Thus the policy of presuming innocence is rational for all those for whom it is more important that no innocent person should ever be convicted than that no guilty person should ever go free, but irrational for those harboring the opposite priorities. If such people proposed or adopted a presumption of guilt, then upon whatever other grounds they might be faulted it could not be for their irrationality in so doing.

The objective by reference to which the policy of accepting the presumption of atheism has to be justified is the attainment of validation of knowledge about the existence and activities of God, if such knowledge is indeed attainable. The inquiries pursued under this procedure are directed toward either acquiring such knowledge or showing who if anyone is already possessed of it.

Knowledge is of course crucially different from mere true belief. All knowledge that, as opposed to knowledge how, involves true belief. But not all true belief constitutes any kind of knowledge. To have a true belief is simply and solely to believe that something is so, and to be in fact right. But someone may believe that this or that is so, and the belief may in fact be true, without its thereby and necessarily constituting knowledge. If true beliefs are to achieve this more elevated status, then their believers have to be properly warranted so to believe. True believers must, that is to say, either have sufficient evidencing reasons or else in some other way be in a position to know.

Evidencing reasons, which constitute evidence for some supposed matter of fact, must be distinguished from motivating reasons, which in the present context constitute motives for self-persuasion regardless of the adequacy or inadequacy of the available evidence. For Blaise Pascal's wager argument began by stating that "reason [by which he meant evidencing reason] can decide nothing here," and proceeded to the conclusion that the only safe, indeed the only sane bet is placed by persuading ourselves of the truth of Roman Catholicism (see Chapter 50, Pragmatic Arguments).

The question whether anyone does actually possess positive knowledge of the existence and activities of God can be illuminatingly approached by applying two passages from the *Discourse on Method* to the present case, and bringing out their true implications. The first comes from part 1, where René Descartes wrote:

For it seemed to me that I might find much more truth in the reasonings which someone makes in matters that affect him closely, the results of which must be detrimental to him if his judgment is faulty, than from the speculations of a man of letters in his study; which produce no concrete effect.

In the second passage, which comes from part 2, he starts from the assertions of philosophers. But his conclusions apply with even greater force to religious beliefs:

While traveling, having recognized that all those who hold opinions quite opposed to ours are not on that account barbarians or savages, but that many exercise as much reason as we do, or more; and, having considered how a given man, with his given mind, being brought up from childhood among the French or Germans becomes different from what he would be if he had always lived among the Chinese or among cannibals. ... I was convinced that our beliefs are based much more on custom and example than on any certain knowledge.

When in part 4 Descartes undertakes to doubt everything which he can doubt, his supposedly almost all-embracing skepticism is directed primarily at beliefs of a kind which, in the first passage quoted, he had given good reason to adjudge the least dubious. For in part 1 he had – ineptly but in his day prudently – granted immunity to locally established religious beliefs. So, "on the grounds that our senses sometimes deceive us," he proceeds to conclude that perhaps there is not "anything corresponding to what they make us imagine." He then attempts to prove, indeed by means of an ontological argument, the existence of a good God who as such cannot permit him to be comprehensively deceived by always delusive sense-data (see Chapter 42, Ontological Arguments).

This entire exercise manifests the need to accept the presumption of atheism. And that requires us to begin by examining any proposed or presupposed conception of God as if we were meeting it for the first time; considering, that is to say, whether it is coherently applicable and, if so, inquiring what evidencing reasons would be necessary and sufficient to establish that it does in fact have application. By contrast Descartes continues to take absolutely for granted the conception of God with which he was equipped by his Jesuit tutors. Later, in the third of his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, he argues that that conception is an innate idea imprinted upon every individual human soul as – as it were, and this is Descartes' own image – its Maker's trademark. Descartes thus attempts to demonstrate that the doubtfully coherent conception of a logically necessary Being must have actual application and then goes on to assert, recklessly and falsely, that it is one with which we are all furnished at or before our births (see Chapter 25, Perfect Being Theology; and Chapter 55, Theism and Incoherence).

Suppose instead that we work with the definition of the word "God" offered at the beginning of Swinburne's powerful philosophical defense of theism. It reads:

A person without a body (i.e., a spirit), present everywhere, the creator and sustainer of the universe, able to do everything (i.e., omnipotent), knowing all things, perfectly good, a source of moral obligation, immutable, eternal, a necessary being, holy, and worthy of worship. (Swinburne 1977, p. 2)

The first difficulty is the identification of the intended subject of these various attributes. For both all the persons who we severally are, and all those others with whom we are variously acquainted are creatures of flesh and blood. It is indeed only from our experience of such creatures of "too, too solid flesh" that we are able to acquire our ideas of persons. So how would it be possible to identify such immaterial spirits or – still more difficult – reidentify them after a lapse of time as being the same individual spirits?

In the present special case this difficulty can be conveniently resolved by making the intended subject the hypothesized ultimate cause of everything else, and therefore identifiable by reference to the universe as a whole. It was a maneuver of this sort which allowed David Hume, in part 2 of his posthumous masterpiece, the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, to make Philo insist "that the question is not concerning the *being* but the *nature* of God" (emphasis original). Until some characteristics are attributed to this hypothesized cause the hypothesis of its existence must remain as uncontentious as it is uninteresting. Philo – and, consequently, Hume – thus becomes able to deny the dangerous charge of atheism while proceeding to argue that it is impossible validly to infer from the observable universe any conclusions about "the *nature* of God."

When we go on to ask what characteristics we might be rationally justified in attributing to this hypothesized subject, it ought to become immediately obvious that it might conceivably possess one or more of the attributes listed in Swinburne's definition without necessarily possessing all or even any of the others. So what might constitute a sufficient evidencing reason for believing in the existence of a Being possessed of one of those defining characteristics will not necessarily be any sort of good reason for believing in the existence of God as thus defined (see Chapter 49, Cumulative Cases, especially the discussion of "distributive" cases).

The grossest and most flagrant example of failure to appreciate this is provided by those who assume that they are both entitled and required to move directly, and without evidencing support from some supposed prior revelation, from the big bang of contemporary cosmology to Swinburne's God as its probable cause. For the whole history of natural science should suggest that, if it ever does become possible to discover the cause or causes of that explosive beginning, then it or they will most likely be impersonally and finitely physical (see Chapter 63, Theism and Physical Cosmology).

In the *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas attempts to defeat the presumption of what Hume, following Pierre Bayle and in deference to Strato of Lampsacus, calls Stratonician atheism:

Now it seems that everything we observe in this world can be fully accounted for by other causes, without assuming a God. Thus natural effects are explained by natural causes, and contrived effects by human reasoning and will. There is therefore no need to suppose that a God exists. (I.ii.3)

Aquinas in his response to this challenge takes his conception of God as an unquestionable given and proceeds immediately to deploy his five promised proofs. These are in fact presented as proofs of the existence of five entities which are described very differently. These different descriptions are then simply assumed to apply to one and the same Supreme Being. Indeed four of the five conclude with "and this is what everybody understands by God" or some equivalent expression.

It is remarkable, yet rarely remarked, that in that same article Aquinas undertakes to meet a second challenge – that of reconciling the abundant evils of the universe with its alleged total dependence upon a creator both omnipotent and perfect (see Chapter 58, The Logical Problem of Evil). Suppose that the existence of a "creator and sustainer of the universe, able to do everything (i.e., omnipotent)" and "knowing all this" can be "known for certain through the creation by the natural light of human reason." Then unless natural reason was being somehow supplemented and reinforced – whether by a supposed supernatural revelation or in some other way – it would scarcely be possible to come even to suspect that that "creator and sustainer" might also be "perfectly good." (For entries on each of the various divine attributes mentioned above, see Part 4, The Concept of God.)

Consider, for example, how Joseph Butler in *The Analogy of Religion: Natural and Revealed*, believing that he has succeeded in showing that "ten thousand instances of design cannot but prove a Designer," immediately mistakes it that he has at the same time proved not only "that there is a God who made and governs the world" but also that that God "will judge it in righteousness" (vol. 1, p. 371). (Butler had, however, earlier asserted that this "moral government must be a scheme quite beyond our comprehension" and drawn the conclusion that "this affords a general answer to all objections against the justice and goodness of it" [vol. 1, p. 162]. What he apparently did not appreciate was that, by thus making the claim that "God who made and governs the world will judge it in righteousness" humanly unfalsifiable, he necessarily deprived it of any humanly intelligible substance.)

Only claims to enjoy knowledge of God from the evidences of natural reason have so far been considered. But the presumption of atheism is equally relevant to claims to

possess such knowledge either upon the basis of some supposed revelation (see Chapter 82, Philosophical Reflection on Revelation and Scripture; and Chapter 51, Tradition) or through allegedly enjoying a kind of knowledge by acquaintance (see Chapter 48, Religious Experience). For those sincerely desiring to know the truth of these most important matters must draw and act upon the moral implicit in Descartes' observations of "how a given man, with his given mind, being brought up from childhood among the French or Germans becomes different from what he would be if he had always lived among the Chinese or among cannibals."

For how, in the light of this observation, can any of us continue to assume that we happen to be members of a uniquely privileged set to whom an authentic revelation has been vouchsafed? (See Chapter 84, Religious Pluralism.) If commitment to a system of religion supposedly constituting or containing a revelation is not to be arbitrary, irrational, and indeed fundamentally frivolous, then the presumption of atheism has to be defeated by showing that there is good reason to believe that this particular pretended revelation is actually authentic.

It is difficult if not impossible to suggest any sufficiently good reason other than that the teachings in question were and/or are supernaturally endorsed by the production of miracles. Consider, for instance, one of the dogmatic definitions of the First Vatican Council: "If anyone shall say that miracles cannot happen ... or that miracles can never be known for certain nor the divine origin of the Christian religion be proved thereby: let them be anathema" (Denzinger 1953, sect. 1816) (see Chapter 47, Miracles).

To establish the authenticity of some particular pretended revelation it would be necessary first to solve the problems of establishing the occurrence of any miracles at all by the methods of critical history – problems first indicated by Hume. Next it would be necessary to show that miracles had actually occurred as apparent supernatural endorsement of the particular teachings in question. But even that would still not be sufficient. For it would also be necessary to establish that no miracles had ever occurred to provide seeming supernatural endorsement for any other, inconsistent teachings.

Finally, consider the case of those who think to defeat the presumption of atheism by referring to what they apparently see as their enjoyment of a kind of knowledge by acquaintance with God. They believe and maintain that they have had, and continue to have, direct experience with God, and they sometimes go on to assert "that you too can have Jesus for a friend."

The crucial distinction here is between two senses of the word "experience," and of its semantic associates. In the ordinary, everyday, objective sense, to claim to have had experience with cows or with computers is to claim that you have had dealings with real flesh-and-blood cows or with real chips-and-wires computers. In the other sense, which we might dub the subject sense, people can truly claim to have had experience with cows or with computers providing that they have dreamed or had hallucinations of cows or of computers, even though they have never actually seen or touched or manipulated a single real, flesh-and-blood cow or a single real, chips-and-wires computer.

Someone's honest claim to have had experience with some sort of object, in the first sense of the word "experience," may be shown – perhaps by someone else – to have been mistaken. But someone's honest claim to have had experience with that same sort of object, in the second sense of the word "experience," constitutes the irrefutable last

word. For those who fail to make and maintain this crucial distinction it becomes all too easy to assume that claims to have had experience with something, in the first sense of “experience,” possess the same irrefutability as they would have were the same word being construed in the second sense. If people make that mistaken assumption, then they may be misled to believe that those challenging their claims are implying that they are lying.

To all atheist observers, those who claim to be having experience with God, and perhaps receiving communications from the same source, appear to be enjoying or suffering experience only in the second, subjective sense, and experience of that second kind constitutes no reason at all for believing in the objective existence of its reported objects. As Thomas Hobbes (1914 [1650]) put it in chapter 32 of his *Leviathan*:

For if a man pretend to me, that God hath spoken to him supernaturally and immediately, and I make doubt of it, I cannot easily perceive what argument he can produce, to oblige me to believe it. ... To say that he hath spoken to him in a dream is no more than to say that he dreamed that God spoke to him.

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## The Verificationist Challenge

MICHAEL MARTIN

### Background

The view that the meaningfulness of God-talk is problematic is not new. David Hume maintained that the only legitimate propositions are those of matters of fact and those of the relations of ideas. In a well-known passage in *An Inquiry concerning Human Understanding*, he argued that, since sentences about God express neither statements of experimental reasoning concerning matters of fact and existence nor statements about the relations of ideas, any volume that contains them should be committed to the flames since it can contain “nothing but sophistry and illusion” (Hume 1955 [1748], p. 173). Moreover, many atheists of the past, for example Charles Bradlaugh (Stein 1980, p. 10), a well-known nineteenth-century atheistic orator and writer, have denied that the concept of God has any meaning (see Chapter 41, Religious Language).

### Atheism and Meaninglessness

What is the relation between meaninglessness and atheism? Positive Atheism – disbelief in God – maintains that “God exists “ is false whereas a meaningless statement is neither true nor false. So positive atheism presupposes that “God exists” is not meaningless. The case is different for negative atheism – not believing in God (see Chapter 53, The Presumption of Atheism). One good reason – but not the only one – for being a negative atheist is that the concept of God is meaningless. If it is meaningless, then one would neither believe that God exists nor believe that God does not exist. One cannot believe a meaningless sentence. But some negative atheists assume that the concept of God is meaningful and simply argue that all the reasons for and against belief in God are weak or unsound.

Can one consistently argue for positive atheism and the meaninglessness of the concept of God? Yes, in two subtle ways. One can maintain that some views of God are meaningful but false, making one a positive atheist, while maintaining that other views of God are meaningless. As we will see shortly, this is Kai Nielsen’s position. One can also argue for the meaninglessness of the concept of God tentatively and hypothetically.



For example, one could make a case for the meaninglessness of the concept but admit that one's argument might not be completely satisfactory and argue for positive atheism as a fallback position. One would be saying in effect, "The concept of God is meaningless. But if it is not, there are good reasons to believe 'God exists' is false" (Martin 1990, p. 77; Martin 1996).

### The Positivist Verifiability Theory of Meaning

The most sustained attack on the meaningfulness of religious language came in the twentieth century with the rise of logical positivism (Diamond and Litzenburg 1975, pp. 1–22). Wanting to eliminate what they considered to be meaningless discourse from philosophy and to establish philosophy on a sound empirical and logical basis, the logical positivists proposed the following theory of meaning:

- (P<sub>1</sub>) A statement has factual meaning if and only if it is empirically verifiable.
- (P<sub>2</sub>) A statement has formal meaning if and only if it is analytic or self-contradictory.
- (P<sub>3</sub>) A statement has cognitive or literal meaning if and only if it has either formal meaning or factual meaning.
- (P<sub>4</sub>) A statement has cognitive or literal meaning if and only if it is either true or false.

Since statements about God were believed to be unverifiable in principle and not considered to be analytic or self-contradictory, they were declared cognitively and literally meaningless.

### Three Typical Responses

There were three typical responses to the positivistic attack on the factual meaningfulness of religious language. Philosophers such as John Hick took it very seriously and attempted to meet it head-on by arguing that religious statements are in principle capable of empirical verification. Hick argued that religious statements could be verified by postmortem experiences; that is, by experiences that take place in what he called a resurrected world – a world not in physical space – to "resurrected beings" (Diamond and Litzenburg 1975, pp. 181–208). But, as Hick's critics pointed out, it is not clear that his resurrected world is itself verifiable. Moreover, it is doubtful that the experiences of resurrected beings could confirm that an all-good, all-powerful, all-knowing being exists (pp. 209–22).

Other philosophers, for example Richard Braithwaite (Diamond and Litzenburg 1975, pp. 127–47), maintained that the logical positivists were correct that religious discourse is not factually meaningful since it is not capable of empirical verification, but they proceeded to give non-cognitive interpretations of it. They argued that although religious language cannot be used to assert or deny the existence of any transcendent Being, it plays other roles in our language; for example, it expresses some moral point of view by means of parables. However, critics of the non-cognitive approach argued that this view of religious language completely distorts its meaning.

The most common reaction to the logical positivists' attack was to reject the verifiability theory of meaning. Thus, for example, Alvin Plantinga (1967, pp. 156–68) argued that the fact that religious statements do not meet the logical positivist criterion of verifiability does not show that religious statements are factually meaningless; rather, the problem is with the verifiability theory.

### Three Standard Criticisms of the Theory and Its Present Standing

There are three standard criticisms of the verifiability theory of meaning. One is that the positivist analysis of meaning seems arbitrary. It is held that there is no good reason why anyone should accept this theory, and that without adequate justification, the theory cannot be used to eliminate religious or metaphysical discourse. Another criticism is that the verifiability theory is self-refuting in the sense that it entails its own meaningfulness. Finally, critics hold that the positivists were unable to formulate a criterion of empirical verifiability precise enough to do the job expected of it, namely to eliminate metaphysical and theological statements as factually meaningless while showing the statements of science to be factually meaningful. They say that as it was presented in various positivistic writings, the criterion was either so broad that any sentence at all – even some clearly nonsensical ones – would be factually meaningful, or else it was so restrictive that it eliminated as “meaningless” the quite legitimate statements of theoretical science.

It is at least in part for these reasons that the verifiability theory is presently out of favor with philosophers of religion. Most leading theistic philosophers of religion believe that the theory has been shown to be inadequate and even leading atheists no longer take it seriously. Thus, the late J. L. Mackie in *The Miracle of Theism* assumed that any verifiability theory of meaning that entails that statements about the existence of God are literally meaningless would itself be highly implausible.

A few philosophers of religion do, however, still take the theory seriously. Kai Nielsen (1971, 1982), an atheist and perhaps the best-known contemporary defender of the verifiability theory, has devoted several books to defending the thesis that religious language is factually meaningless because it is not verifiable in principle. Richard Swinburne (1977), a theist, has attempted to give a detailed refutation of the verifiability theory of meaning. More recently, Michael Martin (1990, ch. 2) has defended the verifiability theory of meaning in the context of justifying negative atheism – the view that one should not hold a belief in God.

### Can the Standard Criticisms be Answered?

The strongest available response to these criticisms can be found in the work of Nielsen. Although Nielsen was strongly influenced by the logical positivist verifiability theory of meaning, his argument is much more sophisticated and far more in tune with the subtleties of religious discourse. He does not maintain that all religious discourse is factually meaningless; on the contrary, he says that the unsophisticated discourse of believers in an anthropomorphic God is not meaningless, but false. He asks us to

consider the view that God is a large and powerful spatial-temporal entity that resides somewhere high in the sky. A sentence expressing this is not factually meaningless, he says. We understand what it means and know in the light of the evidence that the statement it expresses is false. Nielsen is troubled, however, by the discourse of the sophisticated believer who says, for example, that God transcends space and time, has no body, and yet performs actions that affect things in space and time. He maintains that this sort of discourse is factually meaningless and therefore neither true nor false.

Nielsen does not claim that religious discourse is meaningless in all senses of "meaningless." In particular, he does not deny that religious expressions have a use in our language or that one can make inferences on the basis of them. He would hold, for instance, that the sentence

- (1) God has no body and yet acts in the world

is clearly not meaningless in the sense that

- (2) God is gluberfied  
or (3) God big impossible  
or (4) Goo Foo is gluberfied

is meaningless. Terms such as "God," "has a body," "acts," "in the world," unlike "Goo Foo," and "is gluberfied," have uses in our language. Furthermore, (1), unlike (3), has no syntactical irregularities. In addition, "God" has a fixed syntax making possible certain logical inferences from (1). For example, from (1) it follows that

- (1') It is possible for God to act without a body  
and (1'') God does not have eyes and ears.

Nielsen insists, however, that none of this shows that statements like (1) are factually meaningful; that is, that they are either true or false. In the first place, he maintains that the mere fact that one can make an inference from some sentence does not show that it is factually meaningful. For example, from

- (5) Box sleeps more rapidly than Cox

it follows that

- (6) Cox sleeps more slowly than Box.

But it is generally agreed that (5) and (6) are meaningless sentences. Further, (5) illustrates that a sentence that has an unproblematic syntax is not necessarily factually meaningful.

Moreover, according to Nielsen, it does not follow that just because an expression has a use in our language it has factual meaning. He vigorously attacks the view he calls Wittgensteinian fideism that every so-called form of life has its own "language-game" with its own rules and logic and that one cannot critically evaluate

a language-game from the outside. According to Wittgensteinian fideism, it is a serious mistake for a philosopher of religion to impose some external standard of meaning on religious discourse, for such discourse is acceptable as it stands. The job of a philosopher of religion is not to evaluate the discourse of a form of life but to clarify its logic and eliminate the confusions caused by the misuse of language in this form of life. Wittgensteinian fideism, Nielsen maintains, is committed to an absurd form of relativism, namely that every form of life is autonomous and can be evaluated on its own terms and cannot be criticized from the outside. But this relativism, he argues, has absurd consequences. For example, it entails that the forms of life associated with belief in magic and fairies cannot be criticized from the outside (see Chapter 19, Wittgenstein; Chapter 52, Fideism; and Chapter 77, Wittgensteinian Philosophy of Religion).

How then would Nielsen respond to the three standard criticisms of the verifiability theory of meaning? He would maintain that the theory is not arbitrary. In order to understand a factual statement one must have some idea of what counts for or against it; indeed, he would maintain that it is simply part of what it means to understand a statement. That an understanding of what counts for or against a statement is part of what it means to understand a factual statement can, he thinks, be shown by actual examples. Consider clear cases of sentences that do not express statements, for example, "Colors speak faster than the speed of light," "Physics is more mobile than chemistry," "Close the door!" and "I promise to pay you ten dollars." In contrast to clear cases of statements, we have no idea what evidence would in principle count for or against these. Nielsen has challenged critics of the verifiability theory of meaning to come up with one example of "an utterance that would quite unequivocally be generally accepted as a statement of fact that is not so confirmable or infirmable" (Nielsen 1971, p. 67). The verifiability theory matches our intuitions in clear cases of what is factually meaningful and what is not.

But why should we suppose that religious utterances are not cases of meaningful utterances? Nielsen maintains that we can legitimately suppose that there is something amiss in religious language because many religious practitioners suppose there is. Often, he says, religious believers themselves have doubts about whether they are believing anything that is true or false. This is not because of some externally imposed theory of factual meaning that they have accepted. He urges that the difficulty is intrinsic to sophisticated non-anthropomorphic God-talk with its references to "an infinite and non-spatial entity," "a disembodied spirit that acts in the world," and the like. Ordinary thoughtful religious people are puzzled to know what to make of this talk.

Nielsen can be understood to be approaching the problem as follows. Let us call the set of all utterances that are either clearly factually meaningful or clearly factually meaningless *E*. According to Nielsen, the verifiability theory matches our intuitions about the members of *E*. Thus, the theory can be understood to be providing a clear criterion of factual meaningfulness. Once this criterion has gained support from *E*, it can be used to decide the more controversial cases. Given the fact, acknowledged even by many religious believers, that it is unclear if in speaking of God one is asserting any statements at all, one may wish a clear criterion of factual significance. The verifiability theory provides this criterion.

Nielsen's approach also provides an answer to the criticism that the verifiability theory of meaning is self-refuting. The criticism would be valid only if the theory is

interpreted to be a statement. But on Nielsen's approach it should not be so interpreted. The theory is a proposal about how to separate factually meaningless sentences from factually meaningful ones and is to be judged in terms of how well it does this job. It provides a criterion for separating clear cases of factually meaningful statements such as "The cat is on the mat" from clear cases of factually meaningless statements such as "Close the door!" and it also provides a definite criterion in more problematic cases, such as the sentence "God exists."

With respect to the third standard criticism of the verifiability theory of meaning – that the criterion is either too narrow or too broad – Nielsen argues that once one is clear about how in general the verifiability criterion is to be understood, the problems of particular formulations of the criterion can be ignored. Using a formulation of the verifiability theory based on Antony Flew's well-known paper "Theology and Falsification" (Diamond and Litzburg 1975, pp. 257–9), Nielsen maintains that in order to be factually meaningful, religious propositions must be confirmable or disconfirmable in principle by non-religious, straightforward, empirical statements.

Nielsen's formulation of the criterion can be explicated as follows:

- (N<sub>1</sub>) For any statement *S*, *S* is factually meaningful if and only if there is at least some observational statement that could count for or against *S*.
- (N<sub>2</sub>) For any two statements *S*<sub>1</sub> and *S*<sub>2</sub>, *S*<sub>1</sub> has the same factual meaning as *S*<sub>2</sub> if and only if the same observational statements which count to some degree for or against *S*<sub>1</sub> count to the same degree for or against *S*<sub>2</sub>, and conversely.

Using this formulation Nielsen can show how some standard criticisms of the principle, for example those of Alvin Plantinga, fail. Plantinga had argued that

- (7) There is a pink unicorn
- and (8) All crows are black
- and (9) Every democracy has some Fascists

are ruled out as meaningless by various formulations of the verifiability principle although they are factually meaningful. For example, (7) is ruled out by formulations that require the possibility of decisive falsifiability; (8) is ruled out by formulations that require the possibility of decisive confirmability; and (9) is ruled out by formulations that require the possibility of either decisive falsifiability or decisive confirmability. However, on Nielsen's (N<sub>1</sub>) none of the statements is ruled out since there are some observational statements that would count for or against them. Thus, he can maintain that the verifiability criterion of meaning, correctly understood, is not too restrictive.

Does the principle permit more than its followers would wish, however? Consider

- (10) It is not the case that all crows are black.

This statement is factually meaningful by (N<sub>1</sub>). But it may be argued that if (10) is factually meaningful by (N<sub>1</sub>), then so is

- (11) Either it is not the case that all crows are black or God is gluberfied,

which follows deductively from (10). Indeed, it may be said that it is plausible to suppose that any logical consequence of a confirmable statement is itself confirmable. But if this is allowed, then given (11) and

(12) All crows are black

we can deductively infer

(13) God is gluberfied.

But since (13) deductively follows from confirmable statements – hence, from factually meaningful statements – it will be argued that (13) is confirmable and factually meaningful. However, since for (13) one could substitute any statement at all in the above argument, one could show that any sentence is meaningful. But this is absurd.

Although Nielsen does not explicitly consider this sort of problem, others have suggested ways to handle it. Thus, for example, Wesley Salmon (Diamond and Litzenburg 1975, pp. 456–80) in a general defense of the verifiability theory of meaning has argued that one may admit that a factually meaningful sentence can have factually meaningless components. Hence, he sees no problem in allowing that (11) is factually meaningful. Of course, as Salmon points out, such a view conflicts with the standard interpretation of the propositional calculus in which compound sentences must have component sentences that are true or false. But, he maintains, the propositional calculus view of this matter lacks intuitive support. Salmon goes on to show how it is possible to construct rules for eliminating factually meaningless components of compound sentences in ordinary language. Given these rules, one could say that (11) has the same meaning as (10). Consequently, one of the arguments given above,

- (A) It is not the case that all crows are black;  
Therefore, either it is not the case that all crows are black or God is gluberfied

is reduced to

- (B) It is not the case that all crows are black;  
Therefore, it is not the case that all crows are black,

where the factually meaningless component of the conclusion is eliminated. The intuitive validity of (A) is thus preserved in the reduced version (B). The rule used to eliminate one component of the conclusion in (A) has its justification in terms of (N<sub>2</sub>) since, according to (N<sub>2</sub>), the sentence “Either it is not the case that all crows are black or God is gluberfied” has the same factual meaning as “It is not the case that all crows are black.” However, in the second argument it is not possible to preserve validity since the conclusion is factually meaningless. In this way Salmon demonstrates the failure of one common attempt to show that the verifiability theory of meaning is too liberal.

But there is another way that one might attempt to show that (N<sub>1</sub>) is too liberal. Consider the sentence

- (14) God is gluberfied (and if God is gluberfied, then this rose is red).

It may be argued that since (14) entails

- (15) This rose is red

and (15) is confirmed by the direct observation of this rose, (14) is indirectly confirmed. Furthermore, since (14) entails

- (2) God is gluberfied

and whatever follows from a confirmed statement is confirmed, one would have to say that (2) is confirmed and, hence, is factually meaningful.

Since there are no redundant components in (14) and (14) is involved in the derivation of (15), (14) as a whole seems to be confirmed and hence meaningful by the confirmation of (15). Salmon argues, however, that this supposition is based on a widely held but incorrect view of inductive inference according to which induction is the converse of deduction. The thesis that the confirmation of (15) confirms (14) is based on the mistaken view that if *H* deductively implies *C*, then the confirmation of *C* inductively supports *H*. Salmon shows that many of the problems concerning the verifiability theory of meaning that have been noted in the philosophical literature, including Alonzo Church's widely cited critique (Church 1949) of A. J. Ayer's formulation, depend on this mistaken view of induction. And he goes on to show how a more adequate specification of induction and confirmation relations can eliminate the sort of examples typically brought up by critics.

Salmon's efforts at meeting the problems raised by the critics are only a beginning since at the present time we do not have a sufficiently worked out theory of confirmation to determine when one sentence confirms another. Salmon argues that it is important to realize that many of the problems raised against the verifiability theory of meaning are *not* with the inadequacy of the verifiability theory of meaning explicated in terms of confirmation and disconfirmation relations, but with the inadequacy of the confirmation theory used to explicate these relations.

It is because of these uncertainties that Martin (1990, p. 77) has concluded that the case for the factual meaninglessness of God-talk is only *prima facie* justified and that it would be a mistake for atheists to rest their case completely on the verifiability theory of meaning.

## Conclusion

Although attempts to meet the verificationist challenge either by showing that religious discourse is verifiable or by arguing that an adequate non-cognitive account of such discourse is possible seem unpromising, a rejection of the challenge seems premature.



Despite the rejection of the verifiability theory of meaning by most contemporary philosophers of religion, it has the capacity to meet to a large extent the standard criticisms raised against it as well as to provide an important tool for philosophical criticism. The work of Nielsen shows that it can be developed in a sophisticated manner and Salmon's work demonstrates that many of its alleged problems might be overcome by a more adequate theory of confirmation.

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## Theism and Incoherence

MICHAEL MARTIN

There are at least two basic ways to justify disbelief in God. The first is by means of the argument from evil. One argues either that evil is inconsistent with the existence of a being who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good or else that evil makes the existence of such a being unlikely. The second is to show that the concept of God is incoherent or that God's existence is in some other respect conceptually impossible. It is this second way that I will explore in this entry.

Of course, not everyone has the same concept of God. For example, God as conceived by average believers is quite different from the so-called God of the philosophers. Perhaps the idea of God most widely shared is the one identifying God with a perfect being (see Chapter 25, Perfect Being Theology). Though the notion of a perfect being is itself of questionable coherence, a great many "perfect being theologians" have thought it safe to infer from God's perfection that God is omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly free, and morally perfect. In addition to these four "personal attributes," numerous other attributes have been thought to follow from God's perfection. Many of these are called "negative attributes" because they describe ways in which a God is not like us, where the difference is not just one of degree but one of kind. For example, according to many philosophical theologians, especially but not only in the medieval period (see Chapters 9, 10, and 11, which cover Medieval Philosophical Theology), a perfect being would be incorporeal, immutable, impassible, simple in the sense of having no parts, and eternal in the sense of not being temporal.

One source of arguments for the incoherence of the concept of God is the obvious tension between these negative attributes and God's personal attributes. For example, how could a person, a being that has moral qualities, knowledge, and power, have no parts? (See Chapter 31, Simplicity.) And how could a person be atemporal (see Chapter 32, Eternity), especially if that person is thought to interact with the temporal world? (See Chapter 36, Divine Action.) Moreover, God's moral perfection seems to imply that God is compassionate and so capable of feeling sympathetic sorrow. But no being capable of being affected by the suffering of others is impassible (see Chapter 38, Immutability and Impassibility). For reasons like this, many contemporary thinkers (e.g., Swinburne 1977) exclude all of the negative attributes except incorporeality from their concept of God (see Chapter 34, Incorporeality).

This does not, however, solve the problem of the apparent incoherence of the concept of God, because it is doubtful that the personal attributes themselves are jointly or even individually coherent. For example, it appears that moral perfection implies impeccability (the inability to do wrong) while omnipotence implies the ability to do wrong. In addition, there are several reasons to doubt the coherence of the notion of a morally perfect being (see Chapter 30, Goodness; and Chapter 57, The Problem of No Best World). One such reason is this: One aspect of moral goodness is the absence of bad desires. A being with no bad desires is above temptation and that is a good thing. But another aspect of moral goodness is being morally praiseworthy, and maximal moral praiseworthiness is possible only if one manages to overcome temptations to do wrong and thus only if one has bad desires. Philosophers have also struggled to spell out a coherent notion of omnipotence (see Chapter 27, Omnipotence).

Elsewhere (Martin 1990, ch. 12), I have argued that there are at least three conceptual difficulties with the concept of God and in particular with God's alleged personal attributes: one connected with God's omniscience, another with his freedom, and still another with his omnipotence. Here I only have space to consider in more detail a few problems connected with omniscience (see Martin 2000).

### Omniscience as Having All Knowledge

One of the defining properties of God is omniscience (See Chapter 28, Omniscience). But what does this mean? In one important sense to say that God is omniscient is to say that God is all-knowing. To say that God is all-knowing entails that he has all of the knowledge that there is.

Now philosophers have usually distinguished three different kinds of knowledge: propositional, procedural, and knowledge by acquaintance. Briefly, propositional or factual knowledge is knowledge that something is the case and is analyzable as true belief of a certain kind. In contrast, procedural knowledge, or knowledge how, is a type of skill and is not reducible to propositional knowledge. (For an account of these two types of knowledge, see Scheffler 1965.) Finally, knowledge by acquaintance is direct acquaintance with some object, person, or phenomenon (see Hamlyn 1970, pp. 104–6). For example, to say that “I know Mr Jones” implies that, in addition to having detailed propositional knowledge about Mr Jones, one has direct acquaintance with Mr Jones. Similarly, to say that “I know poverty” implies that, besides detailed propositional knowledge of poverty, one has some direct experience of it.

But God could not be omniscient in the sense of having all of the knowledge there is because these three kinds of knowledge, when possessed to the highest degree, are in conflict with each other or with other attributes of God.

For example, God's omniscience conflicts with his incorporeality. If God has perfect procedural knowledge, then he would know how to swim and he would have this knowledge to the highest degree. Yet only a being with a body can have such knowledge and by definition God does not have a body. Therefore, the attribute of being incorporeal and the attribute of being omniscient are in conflict. Thus, since God is by definition both omniscient and incorporeal, it follows that God does not exist.

The property of being all-knowing not only conflicts with the property of being incorporeal, but also with certain moral attributes usually attributed to God. If God is omniscient, he has knowledge by acquaintance of all aspects of lust and envy. One aspect of lust and envy is the feelings of lust and envy. However, part of the concept of God is that he is morally perfect and being morally perfect excludes these feelings. Consequently, there is a contradiction in the concept of God. God, because he is omniscient, must experience the feeling of lust and envy. But God, because he is morally perfect, is excluded from doing so. Consequently, God does not exist. (This argument is developed in Martin 1974.)

In addition, omniscience conflicts with God's omnipotence. Since God is omnipotent and knows it, he can not experience fear, frustration, and despair. For in order to have these experiences one must believe that one is limited in power. But since God is all-knowing and all-powerful, he knows that he is not limited in power. Consequently, he cannot have complete knowledge by acquaintance of all aspects of fear, frustration, and despair. On the other hand, since God is omniscient he must have this knowledge.

It might be argued, of course, that God's moral goodness does not concern his feelings but rather his actions and the principles on which they rest, and so the fact that he knows lust and envy does not affect the Christian moral ideal. Now, it is true that in judging the moral quality of a person one sometimes takes into account only his or her actions and the principles on which they rest. Thus, one who did good deeds and acted on moral principles all his or her life would normally be considered a good person. But still, we would not consider a person morally *perfect*, despite a life of good action, if there was envy and lust in his or her heart. Freedom from such feelings as lust and envy is precisely what religious believers expect of a saint and it is inconceivable that God would be morally inferior to a saint.

It might be objected that, despite the fact that God is omnipotent, he can experience fear and frustration. After all, even humans sometimes experience fear when they know that they have nothing to fear. If given their limitations humans can do this, surely God without these limitations can do so as well. He can experience fear, although he knows he has absolutely nothing to fear. However, in ordinary life, although we are afraid when we know we have nothing to fear, we *also* have a belief, perhaps an unconscious one, that there is something to fear. Indeed, if we did not have such a belief, it would be incorrect to speak of our state as one of fear. Because it is part of the meaning of "P is experiencing fear" that "P believes that P has something to fear," even God must believe he has something to fear if he experiences fear. But he cannot believe he has something to fear if he is omniscient. Furthermore, even if it makes sense for someone to experience fear knowing that they have nothing to fear, this person's fear is by definition irrational. By definition God cannot be irrational.

Finally, it might be argued that God could experience fear by becoming incarnate, as he did in Jesus. However, this solution to the problem will not do. First, there is the general difficulty of understanding how an infinite God could become incarnate in a human being. But even if this idea makes sense, are we to suppose that Jesus was not all-powerful and not all-knowing? If Jesus was all-powerful and all-knowing, the same problem would arise for him. How could an incarnate all-powerful Being experience fear? If he could not, then how could he be all-knowing? If he could experience fear,

how could he be all-powerful? If he was not all-powerful and all-knowing, how could Jesus be God incarnate? Further, if in order to know fear, God had to become incarnate, then before his incarnation he was not omniscient. But God was omniscient before.

I must conclude that God's omniscience, when understood as having all knowledge of all sorts, conflicts with his incorporeality, his moral perfection, and his omnipotence.

### Omniscience as Having All Factual Knowledge

The only solution to the problems posed above is to reject the idea that God is omniscient in the sense of having all three kinds of knowledge. However, to restrict his knowledge to "knowledge that" or factual knowledge, as do defenders of theism such as Richard Swinburne (1977, ch. 10), is to pay a great price. In the first place, this restriction has the paradoxical implication that humans have kinds of knowledge God cannot have. Secondly, it attributes to God purely intellectual knowledge and only of a certain kind at that. Granted this conception of God's knowledge coheres well with the view of God put forth by certain philosophers and theologians, but it does not accord with the ordinary religious believer's view of God. He or she tends to think of God as a super-person who has many of the characteristics of ordinary people but to a greater degree than ordinary persons. However, one characteristic of ordinary people is that of having knowledge how and knowledge by acquaintance. Thus, the price that the believer pays for avoiding contradiction is either paradoxical or is a purely intellectual view of God that is not in keeping with the ordinary believer's.

But let us consider this intellectual view of omniscience on its own merits. Unfortunately, this account also leads to incoherence. I only have space to consider two arguments for this. (Another argument is adduced in Martin 1990, pp. 293–7.)

A neglected argument of Roland Puccetti (1963) proceeds as follows. If *P* is omniscient, then *P* would have knowledge of all facts about the world. Let us call this totality of facts *Y*. So if *P* is omniscient, then *P* knows *Y*. One of the facts included in *Y* is that *P* is omniscient. But in order to know that *P* is omniscient *P* would have to know something besides *Y*. *P* would have to know:

(Z) There are no facts unknown to *P*.

But how can *Z* be known? Puccetti argues that *Z* cannot be known since *Z* is an unrestricted negative existential statement. He admits that it is possible to know the truth about those negative existential statements that are restricted temporally and spatially. But *Z* is a negative existential that is completely uncircumscribed. Knowing *Z*, Puccetti says, would be like knowing it is true that no centaurs exist anywhere at any time.

But why could not God, with his infinite power, search all of space and time and conclude that there are no centaurs? Similarly, why could not God search all space and time and conclude there is no more factual knowledge that he can acquire? Puccetti is not as clear as he might be, but one can assume that he would answer this question by saying God could not exhaustively search space and time because they are both infinite. No matter how much God searched there would be more space and time to search.

Consequently, it is possible that there are facts he does not know. Thus, for God to know that he knows all the facts located in space and time is impossible, and since omniscience entails such knowledge, omniscience is impossible.

Now it may be objected that God will know that Z because he is the sole creator of the totality of facts (other than facts about himself). But this reply begs the question. How could God know that he is the sole creator of the totality of facts unless he also knew Z? But since Z cannot be known, God cannot know he is the sole creator of the totality of facts.

This reconstruction of Puccetti's argument turns on the factual assumptions that space and time are infinite, but some scientists have claimed that space is finite but unbounded. At most, then, the argument proves that *if* space and time are infinite, *then* God is not omniscient. But since God is omniscient by definition, he cannot exist if space and time are infinite.

However, there is a realm that is uncontroversially infinite. If God is omniscient, he would know all mathematical facts and know that there are no mathematical facts that he does not know. In order to know all mathematical facts, however, it would be necessary to investigate all mathematical entities and the relations between and among them. But the number of mathematical entities and relations is infinite. So not even God could complete such an investigation. (For more on the problems involved in divine knowledge of mathematical infinity, see Lazerowitz 1983.)

We can conclude, then, that given the existence of infinite realms of space, time, and mathematical entities, no being could be omniscient; hence, since omniscience is included in the concept of God, God does not exist.

Another argument to show that omniscience, even when it is limited to factual knowledge, is impossible is the following (Grim 1985). Indexical expressions like "I" are essential and, therefore, cannot be replaced by non-indexical ones, for example, proper names. The argument is that what I know when I know:

- (1) I spilled my soup

can be known only by me. Consequently, God, as an omniscience being, cannot exist since God could not know what I know in knowing (1).

The argument proceeds as follows. One might suppose that the proposition expressed by (1) is the same as the proposition expressed by:

- (2) Michael Martin spilled his soup.

But this identity cannot be maintained. When I realize that I spilled my soup my knowledge is not the impersonal kind expressed by (2). I am ashamed and feel guilty about *my* spilling my soup. However, this is the knowledge expressed by (1), not (2). My friends and relatives may be embarrassed about Michael Martin spilling his soup. But only *I* can feel ashamed and guilty since the clumsiness was *mine*.

Furthermore, when I start to clean up after my mishap, this can be fully explained by saying that I realize that I spilled my soup. But it cannot be fully explained by saying that I realize that Michael Martin spilled his soup unless I know that I am Michael Martin. However, this would reintroduce the indexical "I." Thus, God or some other



being could know what is expressed by (2). But not even God could know what is expressed by (1). Consequently, God cannot be omniscient. Thus, God, as a being that is by definition omniscient, cannot exist.

Faced with this problem, defenders of theism have two options. First, the knowledge that I have when I know that (1) – so called indexical knowledge – can be classified as non-propositional. God could exist and still be omniscient. The trouble with this reply is similar to the trouble to a reply criticized above: one is committed to paradoxes. First, an omniscient being is supposed to have all knowledge that non-omniscient beings have. But, on this account, I have knowledge that an omniscient being does not have. Second, God is supposed to have at least all knowledge that humans have. But, on this account, I have knowledge that God could not have.

The second option is to admit that indexical knowledge is propositional but to argue that a being is omniscient so long as it knows all propositional knowledge that it is logically possible for such a being to know. Since it would not be logically possible for such a being to know what I know when I know that (1), God could be omniscient and yet not know what I know when I know that (1). The problem with this solution, however, is that of the last. It is paradoxical to suppose that it is logically impossible for God to have knowledge that it is logically possible for some humans to have; it is paradoxical to suppose that it is logically impossible for an omniscient being to have knowledge that it is logically possible for a human to have.

Thus, one can save the coherence of an omniscient being only by recourse to implausible assumptions or to paradoxes.

## Conclusion

We have seen that there is very good reason to suppose that the traditional concept of God is either incoherent or impossible and, consequently, that God does not exist. Therefore, positive atheism, that is disbelief in a being who is omniscient, omnipotent, morally perfect, and completely free, is indeed justified. As I have suggested there are ways of escaping from this conclusion, but these are purchased at a great price. My argument turns, of course, on analyses of the traditional attributes of God such as omniscience that might be rejected by theists. If they do reject my analyses, then the onus is on them to supply an analysis that does not have similar problems.

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## Foreknowledge and Human Freedom

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The apparent incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and human free will has produced a long and impressive history of reflection on the modalities of time, the nature of omniscience (see Chapter 28, Omniscience), and the sense in which human persons are free. Roughly, the problem is that if there is an omniscient God, his knowledge would presumably encompass all of the future, including the future acts of human beings. And we would expect an omniscient deity's powers of knowing to be so strong that not only does he have no false beliefs, it is *impossible* for him to have false beliefs. But if it is impossible for God's belief about a future human act to be false, it seems to be impossible for that person to do otherwise. How, then, can her act be free?

The mere assumption that God has foreknowledge in the sense of having justified true beliefs about the future does not create any difficulties for human freedom since a belief can be justified and true even though, at the time of the belief, it *can* turn out to be false. What generates the dilemma in its strongest form is the assumption that God's past beliefs about the future are *infallible* and the principle of the necessity of the past, along with some general logical principles and principles that purportedly follow from the definitions of infallibility and the notion of free will. To say that a believer *s* is infallible is to say that *s* cannot make a mistake in his beliefs; necessarily, if *s* believes *b*, *b* is true. So the proposition *s* believes *b* strictly implies *b*. The principle of the necessity of the past is the principle that past states of affairs have a form of necessity simply in virtue of being past; that is to say, what is past is fixed and beyond the power of any being. William of Ockham called the necessity of the past necessity *per accidens*, and the contemporary literature has adopted his usage in calling it accidental necessity.

The argument that these assumptions lead to the denial of human freedom proceeds as follows: Let three moments of time be ordered such that  $t_1 < t_2 < t_3$ .

- (1) Suppose that God infallibly believes at time  $t_1$  that I will do *c* at  $t_3$ . (*premise*)
- (2) The proposition *God believes at  $t_1$  that I will do c at  $t_3$*  is accidentally necessary at  $t_2$ . (*from the principle of the necessity of the past*)
- (3) If a proposition *p* is accidentally necessary at *t* and *p* strictly implies *q*, then *q* is accidentally necessary at *t*. (*transfer of necessity principle*)

- (4) *God believes at  $t_1$  that I will do  $c$  at  $t_3$  entails I will do  $c$  at  $t_3$ . (from the definition of infallibility)*
- (5) *So the proposition I will do  $c$  at  $t_3$  is accidentally necessary at  $t_2$ . (2–4)*
- (6) *If the proposition I will do  $c$  at  $t_3$  is accidentally necessary at  $t_2$ , it is true at  $t_2$  that I cannot do otherwise than to do  $c$  at  $t_3$ . (premise)*
- (7) *If when I do an act I cannot do otherwise, I do not do it freely. (principle of alternate possibilities)*
- (8) *Therefore, I do not do  $c$  at  $t_3$  freely. (5–7)*

Since an omniscient God is assumed to have previous infallible beliefs about every act of every human person, it follows by parity of reasoning that no act of any human person is free. It appears, then, that either humans do not act freely or else God does not have infallible knowledge of future human acts. Let us call the above argument D, the dilemma argument.

Some “solutions” to the dilemma of divine foreknowledge and human free will reject or weaken the assumption of divine foreknowledge or of human freedom. For example, on the standard interpretation of Aristotle’s sea battle argument in *De Interpretation* 9, Aristotle denies a truth value to future contingent propositions. This has the immediate consequence that no future contingent proposition is knowable, not even by an omniscient knower. Alternatively, future contingents may be declared logically unknowable, even if they have a truth value (e.g., Swinburne 1977; Hasker 1989). A third move is to give an account of human freedom that is weaker than the one embraced by causal indeterminists. Just as so-called soft determinists argue that causal determinism is compatible with free will, what we might call soft theological determinists can argue that theological determinism is compatible with free will in a strong enough sense of freedom, but one that is weaker than desired by those who find determinism threatening. Each of these moves concedes that infallible divine foreknowledge is incompatible with a strong sense of human freedom, and simply attempts to make that palatable.

There are three major traditional solutions to the foreknowledge/freedom dilemma which purport to retain both a strong sense of God’s omniscience and a strong sense of human freedom. Each of them rejects the soundness of argument D by introducing special positions on the relationship between God and time, the principles of modality, or both. The first solution comes from Boethius (sixth century) and Thomas Aquinas (thirteenth century). According to this solution, God is timeless (see Chapter 32, Eternity). God and all of his states, including his states of knowing or believing, exist outside of time altogether. God does not actually have beliefs *at* a time  $t_1$ . This means that premise (1) in argument D is false, not because God is ignorant of my act  $c$  at  $t_3$ , but because God does not know my act or any act *as future*.

The second solution comes from William of Ockham (fourteenth century), who made use of the concept of accidental necessity, the necessity of the past. According to this solution, not all of the apparent past is really, or strictly, past. God’s past beliefs about the contingent future are not past in the sense relevant to accidental necessity, and so propositions that say they occurred are not accidentally necessary. Premise (2), then, is false.

The third solution comes from the Jesuit philosopher Luis de Molina (sixteenth century), who denied (3), the transfer of necessity principle (see Freddoso, in Molina 1988, pp. 57–8). Molina developed the idea of divine *scientia media*, or middle

knowledge, to explain how God can secure infallible knowledge of contingent future human acts. The idea is that God knows what any possible free creature would freely choose in any possible circumstance. By combining his knowledge of the circumstances he has willed to create with his middle knowledge, God can know the entire future, including that part of it consisting of free human acts. (For an extensive treatment of Molinism, see Flint 1998.)

I will not examine these traditional solutions here. Instead, I propose that we look at another place in which argument D goes awry.

Let us begin by looking at determinism, its forms, and its difficulties. I will propose two innocuous principles, each of which is connected with a form of determinism. First, there is the *principle of the necessity of the past*: the only possible futures are ones that are compatible with the actual past. The form of determinism connected with this principle is what we might call *accidental determinism*. This is the position that there is only one possible future compatible with the actual past. Argument D allegedly shows that divine foreknowledge leads to accidental determinism on theological grounds. Second, there is the *principle of causation*: the only possible futures are ones that are compatible with the causal history of the actual world. The future must include the effects of all past causes. The form of determinism connected with this principle is *causal determinism*. This is the view that there is only one possible future compatible with the causal history of the world at any given time. That is, every future event is causally determined by events in the past. While these two principles and the two forms of determinism connected with them are conceptually distinct, causal determinism is committed to accidental determinism. If it is true that there is only one possible future compatible with the causal history of the world, there is only one possible future compatible with the entire past history of the world, which includes the causal history as a part. (Readers interested in time and causal determinism may wish to refer to Tooley 1997.)

It is often thought that causal determinism precludes human freedom. If so, the reason it does so ought to be examined, since it may show us what is threatening about accidental determinism. Argument D employs a well-known principle that is frequently used to show the incompatibility between causal determinism and free will – the principle of alternate possibilities in (7). Harry Frankfurt (1969) has a famous series of examples intended to falsify a related principle, the principle that I am not *responsible* for an act if I am not able to do otherwise. The principle used in (7) concerns human freedom rather than responsibility, but Frankfurt-style examples can also be used to falsify (7).

Here is a Frankfurt-style counterexample to (7). Suppose that Black is an insane neurosurgeon who wishes to see White dead, but is unwilling to do the deed himself. Knowing that Jones also despises White and will have a single good opportunity to kill him, Black inserts a mechanism into Jones' brain that enables him to monitor and to control Jones' neurological activities. If Jones' neurological activity suggests that he is on the verge of deciding not to murder White when the opportunity arises, Black's mechanism intervenes and causes Jones to decide to commit the murder. On the other hand, if Jones decides to murder White on his own, the mechanism does not intervene at all. It merely monitors, but does not affect Jones' neurological activity. Now suppose that when the occasion arises, Jones decides to murder White without any help from

Black's mechanism. Intuitively, it seems that Jones acts freely. He brings about his act in exactly the same way as he would have if he had been able to do otherwise. Nonetheless, he is unable to do otherwise since if he had attempted to do so, he would have been thwarted by Black's device. If this interpretation of the situation is justified, (7) is false, and argument D is fallacious.

The Frankfurt cases are counterexamples to (7) and to the principle which was Frankfurt's intended target:

(7') If when I do an act I cannot do otherwise, I am not morally responsible for it.

They are also counterexamples to a number of variations on (7) that might be proposed by a believer in the incompatibility of infallible foreknowledge and human freedom such as:

(7'') If I cannot freely refrain from doing an act, I do not do it freely.

Frankfurt-style cases, then, seem to block a number of reasonable moves from (6) to (8) in argument D.

A possible problem with the Frankfurt-style case as a counterexample to (7) is that it seems to presuppose causal determinism. Frankfurt argues that his cases can be made to fit a non-deterministic world, but in the case just described, it is hard to see how Black can be a perfect predictor if Jones' choice is not causally determined. If Jones shows signs of making the "wrong" choice, Black can intervene with the device to cause him to make the other choice, but when Jones shows every sign of being about to make the "right" choice, the device does nothing. However, if it is never more than probable that Jones will make the "right" choice or any particular choice in a non-deterministic world, Jones retains the ability to change his mind right up to the moment he makes the actual choice. It appears, then, that when Jones shows signs of being about to choose to murder White, he is able to do otherwise after all.

My response to this potential problem is that it does not really matter whether or not Frankfurt cases in a non-deterministic world are literally such that the agent cannot do otherwise. A plausible interpretation of Frankfurt cases is that they show us that the ability to do otherwise is beside the point. They get us to see that what makes Jones' act free is not the presence or absence of alternate possibilities, but something else – the fact that he does it "on his own" without the operation of any conditions which make it the case that he cannot do otherwise. Jones does not act *because of* these conditions. As Frankfurt puts it (1969, p. 837):

Now if someone had no alternative to performing a certain action but did not perform it because he was unable to do otherwise, then he would have performed exactly the same action even if he *could* have done otherwise. The circumstances that made it impossible for him to do otherwise could have been subtracted from the situation without affecting what happened or why it happened in any way.

Here Frankfurt says that the point is that Jones would have done the same thing even if he had been able to do otherwise. What he should have said if he is not presupposing determinism is that Jones *might* have done the same thing if he had been

able to do otherwise. Under the assumption of a non-deterministic universe, Jones might or might not have done the same thing in counterfactual circumstances. But Frankfurt's basic point is sound: whatever Jones does is unaffected by any conditions which make it the case that he cannot do otherwise.

The moral of the story from Frankfurt's point of view is that since the principle of alternate possibilities is false, causal determinism is not so bad. Frankfurt assumes, then, that indeterminists are squeamish about determinism only because of its denial of alternate possibilities. From the point of view of the foreknowledge/free will incompatibilist, the moral is different. If Frankfurt has shown that (7) is false, that means that if causal determinism is bad, it must be bad for some other reason than the fact that it entails the inability to do otherwise. It is, then, all the more important that we identify what is wrong with causal determinism because accidental determinism may have a parallel problem.

The problem has already been identified in part. If the world is causally determined, my act does not really originate in *me*. For my act really to be my own, it must have a certain kind of independence of any conditions which make it the case that I cannot do otherwise. My act must be unaffected by the presence or absence of these conditions; the explanation for its occurrence must not include these conditions to any significant degree. If my act is causally determined, however, it would not have occurred without its causes (suitably described), and the explanation for its occurrence gives a central place to its causes.

To insure my freedom, then, it must be the case that my act, or, more precisely, the choice to perform the act, originates in me, it is not causally determined, and if there are non-causally necessitating features of the situation, i.e., conditions that make it the case that I cannot choose otherwise, it must be true that my act is as independent of those conditions as Jones' choice to murder White is independent of Black's mechanism. This suggests that free choice requires the following:

*S* chooses *c* freely only if (i) *s* brings about the choice of *c*, (ii) *s* is not causally determined to choose *c*, and (iii) *s* might have chosen *c* even if able to do otherwise, i.e., *s* might have chosen *c* even if any non-causally necessitating conditions had not obtained.

Since the only non-causally necessitating condition we are considering is divine foreknowledge, it follows that my choice is free only if (i) I bring it about, (ii) my choice is not causally determined by God or anything else, and (iii) I might have made the same choice even if God had not foreknown what I would choose. That is to say, it would have made no difference to my choice if God had refrained from believing what I would choose.

Now a believer in God's essential omniscience can certainly question whether God *could* withhold belief about my choice *c*. Arguably, to do so is to give up his omniscience. If so, to ask what would or might have happened if God had refrained from having a belief about *c* is to ask what would or might have happened if the impossible had obtained, and that is a nettlesome topic, which I have examined elsewhere (Zagzebski 1990). But notice that if this is a problem, it is Frankfurt's problem also. To what possible world is Frankfurt referring in the passage quoted above? Given that Frankfurt is a causal determinist, a world that is qualitatively almost identical to the actual world



but in which Jones can do otherwise must be a causally determined world in which, miraculously, Jones is able to escape the confines of causality in this one instance. It is not at all clear that that is a possible world at all on Frankfurt's view, yet his point is not difficult to understand. There must be some way of expressing the fact that certain states of affairs, even if necessary, make no difference to the occurrence of a human act. It is this independence of my act from God's omniscience that is maintained in the partial definition of free choice just given.

This leads us to see that on the assumption of divine foreknowledge, both causal determinists and causal indeterminists have a false picture of the range of possible worlds close to the actual world. According to the causal determinist, there are no close possible worlds in which I make a different choice than I make in the actual world since the making of a different choice would involve a difference in the causal sequence; and since every link of that sequence is necessitated by previous events, the world could only have been different at any point if something had been different at the beginning of the world, or if there had been different causal laws. In contrast, the causal indeterminist says that there is a world exactly like the actual world up to the moment at which I choose *c*, but in which I choose not-*c* instead. The foreknowledge advocate must say that they are both wrong, but the indeterminist is much closer to being right since there is another possible world that has the following feature: the only difference between it and the actual world up to the moment I choose *c* is that God believes that I choose not-*c* instead of *c*, and in this world I choose not-*c*. This means that there is a significant difference between the Frankfurt cases and the foreknowledge case. In the Frankfurt cases someone is prepared to thwart my will, and succeeds in doing so in close possible worlds. But in the foreknowledge case no such thing occurs since it is true in every possible world that God believes that I will do what I decide to do. This feature, of course, strengthens the claim that infallible foreknowledge does not take away freedom, but since it is difficult to see how a Frankfurt-style example can be coherently amended to include this feature, it appears that we have reached the limit at which analogies with other cases of being unable to do otherwise are useful. (There are a number of helpful discussions of Frankfurt-style cases and fatalism, including Haji 1999, Hunt 2000, Pereboom 2000, Widerker 2000, and Zagzebski 2000.)

In conclusion, even if (5) is true and all of my acts, both past and future, are accidentally necessary, this fact does not take away my free will in a sense of freedom strong enough to be incompatible with the existence of any necessitating conditions, causal or otherwise, which are such that the subtraction of those conditions from the situation would effect my choice. So accidental determinism itself is no threat to human freedom. What is unacceptable is not the idea that there is only one future compatible with the past; what is unacceptable is that there is a certain kind of dependency between human acts and prior conditions. The lack of alternate possibilities itself is not the problem.

The considerations of this article cast suspicion on the common idea that there is a modal asymmetry between past and future according to which the past has a kind of necessity that the future lacks. Rejecting the modal asymmetry of time would permit us to resolve another foreknowledge dilemma (discussed in Zagzebski 1991, appendix). This dilemma is not directly related to freedom, and is more vexing because it has fewer premises and fewer ways out. This dilemma is as follows:



Dilemma of foreknowledge and time

- (1) There is (and was in the past) an essentially omniscient foreknower.
- (2) It is now possible that Jones will murder White next Friday, and it is now possible that Jones will not murder White next Friday.

On the assumption that the essentially omniscient foreknower exists in every world in which Jones both exists and is in a position to decide whether or not to murder White next Friday (a reasonable assumption if the foreknower is identified with God), the proposition *Jones will murder White next Friday* is strictly equivalent to the proposition *the essentially omniscient foreknower believes Jones will murder White next Friday*. This makes (1) and (2) strictly imply

- (3) It is now possible that the essentially omniscient foreknower believed before now that Jones will murder White next Friday, and it is now possible that the essentially omniscient foreknower believed before now that Jones will not murder White next Friday.

From (1) and the law of excluded middle we know that

- (4) Either the essentially omniscient foreknower did believe Jones will murder White next Friday before now or he did not.

But the principle of the necessity of the past entails

- (5) If he did, it is not now possible that he did not, and if he did not, it is not now possible that he did.

(4) and (5) entail

- (6) Either it is not now possible that he did not, or it is not now possible that he did.

But (6) contradicts (3). Assuming that the law of excluded middle is unassailable, it follows that (1), (2), and (5) are inconsistent.

The rejection of the modal asymmetry of time would have the consequence that there is no sense of “possible” that makes both (2) and (5) true. (2) says that the future has alternate possibilities, while (5) says that the past does not. There are, of course, many different ways of understanding what it means to have alternate possibilities, but the application of the Frankfurt examples to the foreknowledge dilemma gives us reason to think that whatever sense there is to the non-existence of alternate possibilities in the past also applies in the future. And, presumably, if there is a sense in which alternate possibilities apply to the future, it would also apply to the past, although I have not investigated such a sense here. (I discuss temporally asymmetrical necessity and the transfer of necessity principle more fully in Zagzebski 2002.)

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## The Problem of No Best World

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### Background

Traditional versions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all maintain that God is a perfect being (see Chapter 25, Perfect Being Theology). Famously, Anselm understood this doctrine to mean that God is a being than which none greater is *conceivable*. If conceivability does not exhaust possibility, the doctrine of divine perfection can be expressed in stronger terms: God is a being than which none greater is *possible*. This is often thought to entail that God is a necessary being (see Chapter 33, Necessity) who is essentially *unsurpassable* with respect to various attributes, such as power, knowledge, and goodness (see Chapters 27, Omnipotence; 28, Omniscience; and 30, Goodness).

God is also traditionally understood to be the creator and sustainer of all that is (see Chapter 37, Creation and Conservation). In contemporary analytic philosophy of religion, God's creating and sustaining activity is typically construed like this: God surveys the set of possible worlds (or at least the subset of those within his power to actualize), and then freely selects exactly one for actualization, on the basis of its axiological properties. Evidently, discussions of this issue assume that possible worlds have objective axiological status, and that they can be ranked. I will proceed on these assumptions.

So, let's say that *theism* entails that there necessarily exists an essentially unsurpassable creator and sustainer of all that is. What world will such a being select? Famously, Leibniz and others have held that there is exactly one best of all actualizable possible worlds, and that it is the only world worth selecting by God. But then a well-known objection to theism looms: surely *our* world, with all the horrors it contains, is not the best. This, of course, is a version of the problem of evil (see Chapter 58, The Logical Problem of Evil; and Chapter 59, The Evidential Problem of Evil). In response, it has been argued that God stands under no obligation to select the best actualizable world (Adams 1972), but this response has been widely criticized (see, for example, Quinn 1982; Thomas 1996; Rowe 2004, pp. 74–87; and Wielenberg 2004). Other contemporary philosophers, following Aquinas, have suggested instead that perhaps there simply is no best actualizable world, but rather an infinite hierarchy of increasingly better worlds (see, for example, Plantinga 1974, p. 61; Schlesinger 1977; Forrest 1981; Reichenbach 1982, pp. 121–9; and Swinburne 2004, pp. 114–5). Hereafter, I call this position NBW.

On NBW, it is no longer reasonable to demand that God select the unique best actualizable world: since there is no such thing, this is an impossible task, and hence cannot properly be demanded of God (see Chapter 27, Omnipotence). Some have thought that NBW inoculates theism entirely from the problem of evil (Schlessinger 1977), but this has not been well received. (One representative critic is Grover 1993.) Others have argued, against theism, that God ought to have actualized a *better* world than ours, even if no best world is available (Perkins 1983; Chrzan 1987; Elliot 1993). Against the ontological backdrop of NBW, then, the discussion of the problem of evil continues.

## The Problem of No Best World

In recent years, philosophers have pursued a different criticism of theism based on NBW. They have suggested on purely *a priori* grounds that NBW, together with some plausible principles concerning improbability, logically precludes the existence of an unsurpassable being. (This argument is advanced in various ways by Grover 1988, 2003, 2004; Rowe 1993, 1994, 2002, 2004; Sobel 2004, pp. 468–79; and Wielenberg 2004.) The core of this argument can be expressed with reference to the following inconsistent set of propositions:

- NBW For every world *w* that is within God's power to actualize, there is a better world, *x*, that God has the power to actualize instead.
- P1 If it is possible for the *product* of a world-actualizing action performed by some being to have been better, then, *ceteris paribus*, it is possible for that being's *action* to have been (morally or rationally) better.
- P2 If it is possible for the world-actualizing *action* performed by some being to have been (morally or rationally) better, then, *ceteris paribus*, it is possible for *that being* to have been better.
- G There *possibly* exists a being who is essentially unsurpassable in power, knowledge, goodness, and rationality.

Critics of theism urge that since this set is inconsistent, and since P1 and P2 are plausible, defenders of NBW ought to reject G. This amounts to an *a priori* argument for the *impossibility* of an essentially unsurpassable God on NBW, and has come to be called *the problem of no best world*. It is distinct from the problem of evil in several important respects. First, it proceeds entirely *a priori*, while arguments from evil generally contain at least one *a posteriori* premise about the existence, scope, or distribution of evil. Second, this argument concludes that an essentially unsurpassable God is *impossible* – a much stronger conclusion than arguments from evil can warrant. Third, this argument could still be advanced if evil were *metaphysically impossible*. It is an argument from *improvability*, rather than from *evil*.

## Theistic Responses: Four Categories

In this section, I survey four broad ways in which the theist might respond. First, the theist might reject NBW and revert to the Leibnizian view that there is a unique best

of all actualizable worlds (Grover 1988, 2004). But difficulties beset this move. There is the problem of evil, as noted above. In addition, there are doctrinal concerns for theism: God is traditionally taken to be *free* with respect to world-actualization, but if the only world an unsurpassable being can justifiably select is the best one available, is it still reasonable to suppose that God acts freely in this regard? And if not, is God's choice really a *good* one – one worthy of thanks and praise? (For negative answers to these questions, see Rowe 2004). Relatedly, some have suggested that if the only world God can select is the unique best, then modal collapse ensues: everything is necessary; nothing can be otherwise than it is (Resnick 1973; Heller 2001).

Second, the theist might try to reverse the argument: granting NBW, she might claim that G – a modest proposition – is better supported than P1 and P2. How might she defend G? Of course, a good argument for the actual existence of an essentially unsurpassable deity would do, since this would establish *a fortiori* that such a being is possible. More modestly, she might try to show that God is possible, perhaps by urging that an essentially unsurpassable being is conceivable, and by claiming that conceivability is a reliable indicator of possibility. Or, more modestly still, she might follow Plantinga and argue that G can be a *properly basic belief* for the theist, given certain conditions (see Chapter 79, Reformed Epistemology). If any such strategy makes it more plausible to maintain G than P1 and P2, then this argument fails.

Third, the theist might sacrifice her commitment to essential divine unsurpassability (in other words, deny G). She might concede that G is precluded by the conjunction of P1, P2, and NBW, and grant that the latter three are plausible. But she might then construct an account of divine perfection that does not involve essential divine unsurpassability, or some other notion of God altogether (see Kraay 2005b, pp. 30–2; Wainwright 2005, p. 18). This move is unlikely to please most traditional monotheists, however, since they typically consider essential divine unsurpassability to be non-negotiable.

Finally, of course, the most natural response for the theist is to attack P1 or P2 directly. This may take one of two forms: one might suggest that their conjunction is unmotivated (or defeated) by reflection on human cases, or one might allege that their conjunction is implausible in the divine case. In what follows, I briefly survey some important criticisms of P1 and P2 published to date. I argue that none is decisive, from which I conclude that, given the plausibility of NBW, the problem of no best world remains a significant threat to theism.

### *Criticisms of P1*

Bruce Langtry offers an argument that can be construed as a criticism of P1 (1996, 2006). He thinks that in ordinary human affairs, it may be the case that by bringing about better states of affairs, agents act in a better way. But Langtry denies that P1 is a plausible application of this insight to the divine case:

It is logically necessary that if a being is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good then it cannot act in a morally better way, or more rationally, than it in fact acts. What [NBW] implies is that, given that an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good being is logically possible, there are worlds V and W *such that V is better than W*, and God can actualise V

without violating any moral duty, but God's actualising V is *not a morally better action*, or more rational, than his actualising W. (1996, p. 320, and see 2006, p. 467)

In short, Langtry insists that on NBW, there are worlds *good enough* for God to actualize, and that, accordingly, God cannot be faulted for selecting one of these.

This argument, however, begs the question by tacitly assuming that an unsurpassable being is logically possible. On this assumption, granting NBW and P2, then of course P1 must be rejected. But the argument under review purports to show that G is false. It will not do to *assume* G in a response: supporting reasons must be offered, perhaps along the lines noted in the previous section (see Rowe 2004, pp. 121–7; Kraay 2005a).

A more promising objection to P1 appeals to considerations about free will. Brian Leftow (2005a, 2005b) argues that P1 objectionably assumes that God has complete control over the axiological status of the *product* of his world-actualizing action. (See also Wierenga 2007, 212–14). Leftow rightly observes that the moral worth of actions performed by free creatures in that world is an important contributor to the overall axiological status of a world. But given *libertarian* freedom, which many theists accept, this significant determinant of the overall status of a world is, quite simply, beyond God's control (see Chapter 56, Foreknowledge and Human Freedom; and Chapter 39, Providence). Accordingly, it is possible for the *product* of God's world-actualizing activity to have been better, even though God's *action* – in actualizing the world and the libertarian-free moral agents it contains – could not have been better. If this is plausible, P1 can be rejected.

Leftow's objection aims to depict a scenario according to which the antecedent of P1 is true, while its consequent is false. But how is *creaturely* freedom supposed to bear on the antecedent of P1, which concerns the product of a *divine* world-actualizing action? The objection contends that the better *creaturely* actions are, *ceteris paribus*, the better the product of God's action will be. Notice, however, that this assumes the *product* of a divine world-actualizing action to be the *entire* world under consideration, including the actions of creatures.

This assumption, however, is illegitimate: the actions of *creatures* are not properly considered part of the product of God's world-actualizing action. Libertarian actions are – by definition – outside God's control. (I here set Molinism aside, but see Chapter 39, Providence.) God and creatures are standardly taken to be *collaborators* in the actualization of a world: both play a role in determining which world is actual. God is responsible for a world's being the way it is prior to the introduction of libertarian creatures, and God is also responsible for the introduction of such creatures: all this properly counts as the product of God's world-actualizing action. But if such creatures are introduced and act freely, they help make it the case that one world rather than another is actual, and such determinations count as the product of *their* world-actualizing actions. The resulting world, then, is partly the product of God's actions, and partly the product of creatures' actions. If this distinction is plausible, then Leftow's objection to P1 fails (see Kraay 2007).

Daniel and Francis Howard-Snyder (1994, 1996) offer a different argument against P1. They suggest a two-step model of world-selection, on which P1 can plausibly be denied. God first sorts the actualizable worlds into two subsets based on axiologically



relevant criteria: one subset consists of “acceptable” worlds, and the other contains the “unacceptable” ones. The Howard-Snyders offer four examples of such sorting principles (1996, p. 424):

- (i) No world in which beings live lives which are not worth living is acceptable;
- (ii) No world in which beings experience gratuitous suffering is acceptable;
- (iii) No world in which beings live lives which are not as happy and fulfilled as those lives could possibly be is acceptable;
- (iv) No world empty of sentient, rational beings is acceptable.

Each member of the set of “acceptable” worlds is next assigned a unique ordinal to represent its axiological status. The least acceptable world is “1,” the second-least is “2,” and so on. (For the sake of simplicity, they assume that all worlds are commensurable, and that there are no ties.) God then selects from this set of worlds *at random*. The Howard-Snyders think that, even though it is always possible for God to select a better world than he does, this model of world-actualization is unsurpassable. In short, they hold that on this model, the antecedent of P1 is true, but the consequent is false.

Are both parts of God’s world-actualizing action unsurpassable, on this model? First consider the sorting of worlds into the categories “acceptable” and “unacceptable.” The Howard-Snyders claim that it is plausible to suppose that there is a unique *best partition principle*, and they stipulate that God acts on it (1996, 423–4). I agree that if there is such a principle, an unsurpassable being will act on it. But it is unreasonable to suppose that such a principle exists on NBW. The Howard-Snyders maintain that partition principles can be ranked, and presumably they are to be ranked according to the standard they express: the higher the partition point, the better the principle. But there are infinitely many points at which to partition the set of possible worlds. So the Howard-Snyders must hold that there is a unique partition point such that all principles that invoke a higher point fail to express a genuinely higher standard. But this is entirely at odds with the intuitions that drive NBW. It is much more plausible to think that, just as there are increasingly better worlds on NBW, so too there are increasingly better partition principles (see Kraay 2005a).

Suppose, though, that there is indeed a unique unsurpassable partition principle. God’s use of this principle to sort worlds constitutes the first step in the two-stage process of world-actualization proposed by the Howard-Snyders’ model. Recall that for their model to be a successful counterexample to P1, *both* stages of God’s world-actualizing action must be unsurpassable. So let’s consider the second stage: random selection. Some object that it is absurd to suggest that God use a randomizer, since God would *foreknow* the result (Rescher 1969, pp. 156–7). But a reasonable reply holds that there are *no truths* concerning the deliverances of randomizers (Howard-Snyder and Howard-Snyder 1994, p. 266; Grover 2003, p. 148; Strickland 2006, p. 151). On this view, there is nothing for God to foreknow, in which case this does not count against his omniscience.

A randomizer is a device or procedure that delivers a random output. It seems reasonable to suppose that there is more than one possible randomizer. And perhaps they too can be ranked in terms of their axiological status. If so, it is natural to expect that God would use the *best* device or procedure available – supposing there is such a thing.



But it's plausible to think that there is no best randomizer on NBW. *Ceteris paribus*, randomizer A is better than randomizer B if it reliably selects a better world than B does. Suppose, for example, that randomizer A is a device or procedure used to select a world from the set of "acceptable" worlds, and that randomizer B uses the deliverances of A, and then *adds one*. Randomizer B will deliver a random result, to be sure, but it reliably picks out a better world than A does. So there is excellent reason for God to prefer randomizer B to A. But, of course, a similar procedure can be used to show that *any* proposed randomizer is surpassable. So it is difficult to see how the Howard-Snyders can justifiably assert that on their model God uses an unsurpassable randomizing device or procedure. Accordingly, since they have not advanced a model of *unsurpassable* divine world-actualizing activity, their case against P1 fails. (For criticisms of the Howard-Snyders, see Grover 2003, 2004; Kraay 2005a, 2006, 2008; Rowe 1994, 2004, pp. 94–8; and Steinberg 2005, 2007.)

### *Criticisms of P2*

Thomas Morris identifies two theses that might be thought to underwrite P2 (1993, p. 242):

- (i) The goodness of an agent's actions is *productive* of the agent's goodness.
- (ii) The goodness of an agent's actions is *expressive* of the agent's goodness.

Morris thinks that both may be plausible in ordinary human affairs, but denies that either applies to God in this context. He reasons that (i) absurdly imputes *moral potential* to an unsurpassable being, and that (ii) absurdly suggests that there could be a *perfect expression* of God's goodness in choosing a world for actualization, even though this is impossible on NBW.

Morris' mistake – like Langtry's – is to assume that G can safely be granted in this discussion. Morris takes G to be unproblematic, and, given NBW and P1, he declares P2 absurd. But this merely begs the question. The burden of proof rests on the defender of the no best world argument to show that NBW, P1, and P2 are *each* more plausible than G, and the onus is on the critic to deny this. The critic cannot simply assume G; supporting reasons must be offered (see Rowe 2004, pp. 99–103 and Kraay 2005a).

Like Morris, William Hasker thinks that an illegitimate complaint is made of God in the no best world argument, and his argument is best construed as a rejection of P2. In a series of papers (2004a, 2004b, 2005), Hasker defends the following argument:

- (1) If, necessarily, I fail to do the best I can, then, necessarily, I fail to do better than I actually did.
- (2) If, necessarily, I fail to do better than I actually did, then failing to do better than I actually did is not a moral fault.
- (3) If, necessarily, I fail to do the best I can, then failing to do better than I actually did is not a moral fault.

Clearly, (3) follows from (1) and (2). And, with respect to the selection and actualization of a world on NBW, the antecedent of (1) and (3) is true of God: it is impossible for God

to “do his best.” So, if Hasker’s argument is sound, it is unreasonable to fault God for failing to do better than he does in actualizing a world on NBW. In other words, even though God’s *action* could have been better, it is not the case that *God* could have been better: P2 is false.

But is this argument sound? Premise (1) is self-evident, so the key premise is (2). Hasker defends (2) by pointing out its similarity to the following:

- (4) If, necessarily, I fail to do the best I can, then failing to do the best I can is not a moral fault.

(4) is not disputed in the literature on world actualization. So if Hasker is right that (2) should be accepted because of its similarity to (4), he has given good reason to think that his argument is sound.

Hasker claims that the salient similarity between (2) and (4) is this: both claims assert that God’s *inability to contravene a necessary truth* cannot be deemed a fault. On NBW, it is a necessary truth that God *fails to do his best* with respect to world selection and actualization, and so, since not even God can contravene a necessary truth, this is no failure on God’s part. Equally, on NBW, it is necessarily true that God *fails to do better* than he does with respect to world selection and actualization. So, by parity of reasoning, Hasker urges that God’s failure to contravene this necessary truth should not be deemed a fault.

But there is an important difference between these two necessary truths. The reason why God is not properly to be blamed for failing to *do his best* (i.e., actualize the best possible world) on NBW is that this is a *logically impossible task* – which is just to say that there simply is no task at all to perform. But in contrast, God’s *doing better* than he does (i.e., actualizing a better world) is a *logically possible task* – and this is true no matter what world God actualizes on NBW. Given this difference, it is far from clear that Hasker has shown that God cannot reasonably be faulted for failing to do better than he does on NBW. (Criticisms of Hasker can be found in Almeida 2005, 2006; Kraay 2005b; Rowe 2004, pp. 104–13; and Rowe 2005.)

In conclusion, if NBW is plausible, the problem of no best world poses a significant challenge to the core theistic belief that there necessarily exists an essentially unsurpassable being who is the creator and sustainer of all that is. I have outlined four broad ways in which theists might respond. The most natural response is to criticize either P1 or P2, but I have argued that several recent attempts fail. If I’m right, theists should attempt to construct new criticisms of these claims, or find another response to this problem. But it should be noted that defenders of this argument for atheism also bear the burden of showing that P1 and P2 are indeed plausible principles on NBW.

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## The Logical Problem of Evil

MICHAEL L. PETERSON

The logical problem of evil revolves around the charge that certain propositions about God and evil are logically inconsistent, whereas the evidential problem of evil cites evil that provides inductive grounds for rejecting theistic belief (see Chapter 59, The Evidential Problem of Evil). After robust discussion of the logical problem in the 1950s and 1960s, many philosophers in the late 1970s pronounced it to be settled by the free will defense and migrated to the evidential problem. However, the logical problem is making a surprising comeback in more evolved forms. In this chapter, we review the classic Mackie-Plantinga debate in analytic philosophy of religion, then analyze recent book-length treatments by Marilyn Adams and Peter van Inwagen, and finally note new directions in the discussion.

### The Logical Argument and the Free Will Defense

The logical problem has ancient roots in Epicurus' question about whether God's power or goodness, or both, must be surrendered in light of evil, and it echoes through parts 10 and 11 of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (see Chapter 13, Early Modern Philosophical Theology in Great Britain). Yet its early shape for contemporary analytic philosophy of religion was provided by J. L. Mackie (Mackie 1955), who argued that the propositions

- (1) God is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good

and

- (2) Evil exists

are logically inconsistent. The logical problem (also called the *a priori* problem and deductive problem) challenged theists to clarify key terms and formulate effective strategies to reconcile the propositions in question.

While Mackie argued that the theist *qua* theist must believe both that God exists and that evil exists but cannot do so consistently, he admits that the inconsistency is neither

explicit nor formal in nature. In order to make the inconsistency explicit, he proposes additional propositions, or “quasi-logical” rules, such as “a good thing always eliminates evil insofar as it can” and “there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do.” Now, (1), Mackie argues, entails:

- (-2) Evil does not exist,

which ostensibly completes the *reductio* proof of the irrationality of theism.

Although Nelson Pike (Pike 1963), Keith Yandell (Yandell 1971), and other philosophers offered important responses, Alvin Plantinga’s response is considered classic. Plantinga laid down conditions that Mackie’s auxiliary propositions must meet: they must be “necessarily true, essential to theism, or a logical consequence of such propositions” (Plantinga 1967, p. 117). Theists generally came to argue that auxiliary propositions offered by critics either beg the question by specifying propositions that are not essential to theism or lift out of context propositions that are essential to theism but impute new meanings to them which the theist need not accept.

Plantinga maintained that, if the critic is to win the debate, he will have to show that a proposition very much like

- (3) If evil exists, then it is unjustified

is a necessary truth. Plantinga, however, showed that (3) is not a necessary truth and thus that (1) and (2) are indeed consistent. His general strategy for proving consistency is straightforward: to prove that two propositions  $p$  and  $q$  are consistent, one must find a third proposition  $r$  which is consistent with  $p$  and, conjoined with  $p$ , entails  $q$ . The free will defense was born as Plantinga found proposition  $r$  in a statement about the actions of free creatures, a proposition whose conjunction with (1) is consistent and entails (2). Plantinga finds the key proposition embedded within a story about God’s wanting to create a world containing moral good. So God brings personal beings into existence and endows them with significant free will, since no moral goods can exist without it. But while it is possible that there be a world containing creatures with libertarian freedom who always do what is right, it is not within God’s power to bring this about. What free creatures do is up to them.

Plantinga maintains that a proposition such as the following is entirely possible:

- (4) Every possible person goes wrong in every possible world in which that person exists.

Thus, he claims that the heart of the free will defense is that the following proposition is possible:

- (5) It was not within God’s power to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil.

The free will defender need not claim that (5) is in fact true or even probably true; he need only claim that it is possibly true in order to rebut the logical argument from evil. Plantinga’s approach to *defense* is to make minimal philosophical and theological

commitments. Plantinga later framed the defense in terms of the principles of modal logic and the divine actualization of possible worlds (Plantinga 1974, ch. 9).

J. L. Mackie and Antony Flew opposed the free will defense because it assumes an incompatibilist view of human freedom (free will is incompatible with any form of determinism) and instead endorsed compatibilism (free will is compatible with determinism, even divine determinism). Compatibilism entails that an omnipotent being can create a world in which free persons always do what is right. Another debate involved omniscience: presumably, God foreknows what evils creatures will bring about and thus, it seems, would choose a better world to actualize, i.e., one with less evil. Plantinga's defense assumes "middle knowledge" (i.e., that God knows the truth of counterfactuals of freedom) but includes the claim that the logic of libertarian free will prevents God from actualizing just any possible world he pleases.

### Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God

Marilyn Adams engages a version of the logical problem that focuses on "horrendous evils," defined as evils "the participation in which (that is, the doing or suffering of which) constitutes *prima facie* reason to doubt whether the participant's life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to him/her on the whole" (Adams 1999, p. 26). Such evils – raping a woman and axing off her arms, extreme child abuse and murder, detonating nuclear bombs over populated areas – raise the problem of whether the destruction of meaning in the lives of individuals is logically compatible with God's goodness. Adams then defines God's goodness not simply as global goodness (which aims at creating worlds that are good on the whole) but as "person-centered" goodness – which means that God is good to each individual person only if he guarantees to each one a life that is a great good on the whole and one in which participation in horrors is not merely "balanced off" or compensated but "defeated" within the context of her own life and recognized as such by her.

The defeat of horrendous evil *e* requires that it be included in some good-enough whole to which it bears a relation of organic (rather than additive) unity. Adams claims that this would defeat the judgment that "the life of *x* cannot be worthwhile given that it includes *e*"; but the judgment "*e* is horrendous" would still stand. Since horrors are utterly destructive of personal meaning, no finite and temporal goods, no matter how great, can defeat them. The defeat of horrors necessitates the infinite and incommensurable good of God himself, which means that victims of horrors have intimate communion with God in temporal life as well as in the afterlife. Adams rejects the claim that divine goodness must be understood and defended in terms of the same moral obligations all personal creatures have to one another on the grounds that God is of a different ontological category and therefore cannot have moral obligations to creatures. Divine goodness (including goodness that will be shown to victims of horrors), she claims, is the unsurpassable metaphysical goodness of God's being and therefore essentially includes aesthetic goodness, i.e., divine beauty (see Chapter 35, Beauty). The aesthetic solution at the individual level (i.e., enablement of persons to see positive value in their lives) is markedly different from the generic aesthetic solutions for the global problem of evil (e.g., temporal evils fit into a higher harmony).



Adams' rendition of the concrete logical problem of evil turns on a conception of divine goodness as preserving or restoring meaning in the lives of individuals. Technically, to form a logical argument, this claim would have to be a necessary truth, which it clearly does not seem to be. Neither is it essential to Christian theism such that all Christian theists must accept her exact specification of the attribute of divine goodness. So, perhaps she should have framed her response as addressing the evidential argument, particularly since she seeks to show that reasonable versions of full-orbed Christian theism – as opposed to restricted theism – have significant explanatory power in addressing the world's worst evils. Furthermore, Adams argues that her person-centered-goodness approach, which requires that God be good to *all* individuals, entails that the concept of eternal hell must be rejected, whereas traditional theodicies sometimes claim that hell is simply the price of having a world of free creatures who can determine their own destiny (see Chapter 74, Resurrection, Heaven, and Hell). But Adams is confident that God will keep errant free beings from eternal hell in some way that is "agency-enabling," not "agency-obstructing" or coercive. She reasons: "If this should mean causally determining some things in order to prevent everlasting ruin, I see this as no more an insult to our dignity than a mother's changing a baby's diaper is to the baby" (Adams 1999, p. 157). The "metaphysical size gap" employed here – i.e., the incommensurability of divine and human agency – vacillates between suggesting, on the one hand, that God can somehow effect his will with free creatures while they remain free, and suggesting, on the other hand, that God may directly contravene libertarian choice to ensure desired strategic outcomes. Thus, the compatibilist/incompatibilist controversy lurks here with regard to eternal, rather than temporal, existence. Adams needs to provide a more analytically precise and enlightening account of the divine-human relation than the mother-baby analogy allows. So, it still may be that horrendous evils can be shown defeated by the resources of Christian theology, but more work needs to be done to show convincingly that it will be in the way Adams thinks.

## Evil and Philosophical Failure

Peter van Inwagen treats both the global and local versions of the problem of evil, rejecting (without much explanation) the familiar distinction between logical and evidential versions as useless. Since his points apply to both logical and evidential versions, he develops a defensive strategy based on a concept of what it means for a philosophical argument to be a failure (or success). Fresh insights into philosophical methodology emerge as van Inwagen moves beyond both the coercion model (in which one seeks to provide unassailable arguments from indisputable premises) and the conversion model (in which each of two parties tries to persuade the other to surrender his position and adopt the opposing view), identifying them as setting the bar for success unrealistically high. Van Inwagen's forensic model takes into account the context of argument: "An argument for *p* is a success just in the case that it can be used, under ideal circumstances, to convert an audience of ideal agnostics (agnostics with respect to *p*) to belief in *p* – in the presence of an ideal opponent of belief in *p*" (van Inwagen 2006, p. 47). It is assumed that the neutral "agnostic" audience possesses a high

degree of logical and philosophical sophistication as well as intellectual honesty. This model clearly has important consequences for issues of begging the question (since now it is argumentatively permissible to assert premises which one's opponent rejects) and burden of proof (since now one opponent's role is to block the other opponent's attempt to convert an ideal audience).

A successful defense, for van Inwagen, should keep the argument from evil from moving an ideal agnostic audience to atheism – i.e., it will show it to be a failure. Since the standard for the debate regards what is permissible in front of an ideal agnostic audience rather than what premises your opponent accepts, van Inwagen is free to include propositions arising from the common understanding of God in the great theistic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. But a defense, which may be verbally similar to a theodicy, is meant to be only a plausible story (i.e., logically consistent and epistemologically possible, or true for all anyone knows), whereas the theodicy is meant to be a true story about why God allows evil. Now, the problem of evil will have been shown a failure if the audience, upon considering a defense, gives the following response: “Given that God exists, the rest of the story might well be true. I can’t see any reason to rule it out.” Of course, if the story is true, then, granted that the argument from evil is valid, it must have at least one false premise. Van Inwagen then crafts separate defenses against the global and local arguments, respectively, because a satisfactory response to one does not necessarily imply a satisfactory response to the other.

The global argument asserts that there is a vast amount of horrible evil which should not exist if there is a God – and concludes that there is no God. Van Inwagen points out that an adequate defense cannot simply be a story about how God brings about some greater good from the evils of the world, a good that outweighs them. It would also have to include, at the very least, the proposition that God was *unable* to bring about the greater good without allowing the evils (or some other evils as bad or worse). He agrees that in some sense the non-existence of evil must be what a perfectly good, omnipotent being wants, but it does not follow *logically* that God is able to bring about the object of his desire, since it is logically possible that he might have reasons for allowing evil to exist that, in his wisdom, outweigh the desirability of the non-existence of evil.

Van Inwagen offers an “expanded” version of the free will defense to address the amounts and kinds of evils in the actual world. An omnipotent, morally perfect God created a very good world and guided the course of its evolution to bring about free, rational, personal beings capable of loving him. The free beings misused their power of choice and thus brought moral evil into the world. God allows moral evil in order to preserve the good of free will which outweighs the evils. God also permits natural evils (such as the Lisbon earthquake and the Asian tsunami) to increase the negative character of the world so that free creatures will understand the need to be rescued. God could have prevented the evils that accentuate the negative character of the world and opted instead for directly causing the understanding and desire in persons that lead to their seeking him. But this would be to sustain a world that is in reality worse than the actual world and to short-circuit the process of learning through bitter experience of and earnest reflection on the seriousness of separation from God and the attendant need for him. Upon hearing this story, an ideal agnostic would say that, given that God exists, the rest of the story might well be true; thus, the premise claiming that if God

exists there would not be vast amounts of evil might well be false. Hence, the global argument from evil is a failure.

Even if van Inwagen's defense works at the global level, the local argument from evil turns on whether the existence of God is compatible with the existence of certain particular very bad events – "horrors." The general form of the local argument – patterned after Rowe's (Rowe 1979) evidential argument from evil – is as follows:

1. If a particular horror *H* had not occurred, the world would be no worse than it is (and might arguably be better).
2. *H* in fact occurred.
3. If a morally perfect creator could have omitted *H* from the world, and if that world would have been no worse if it had been omitted than if had been included, then the morally perfect creator would have omitted *H* from the world, provided he had the power to accomplish this.
4. If an omnipotent creator created the world, then he had the power to omit *H*.
5. Therefore, there is no omnipotent, morally perfect creator.

Typical theistic responses attack premise 1, seeking to show either that we might not have epistemic access to goods that justify *H* (e.g., skeptical theist defenses) or that we actually possess some knowledge of what goods justify *H* (e.g., traditional theodicies).

Van Inwagen believes, however, that premise 1 is very plausible because, surely, the existential generalization is highly likely that, in the history of the world, there has been at least one horror. For example, for *H* in the argument, he suggests the Mutilation, which is a true story of a man overcoming a young woman in a secluded place, raping her, chopping off her arms, and leaving her for dead, although she survives and lives a miserable, broken life. Since van Inwagen believes *H* makes premise 1 true, he attacks premise 3 by rejecting the underlying moral principle that, if one is in a position to prevent some evil, then one is obligated to prevent it unless allowing it results in some outweighing good or in some other evil equally bad or worse. With his global defense as background, he argues that any particular evil may have no explanation whatsoever, that it may be entirely due to chance. Given that God chooses to allow some horrors, there is an unavoidable morally arbitrary line that God must draw between the horrors God will and will not allow. But then the putative moral principle fails precisely because it in effect forbids the drawing of morally arbitrary lines. It will not do to insist that God is obligated to allow only the *minimum* number of horrors consistent with his plan. "For any *n*, if the existence of at most *n* horrors is consistent with God's plan, the existence of at most *n* – 1 horrors will be equally consistent with God's plan" (van Inwagen 2006, p. 106). Likewise there is no clearly defined minimum number of raindrops that would have to fall on France during the twentieth century that is consistent with its being a fertile country, for, whatever number one specifies, one less raindrop would seem to make no difference. But had God allowed one-half or one-fourth the number, or even no raindrops, to fall, then surely France would not be fertile. There is simply an arbitrary line to be drawn here. The *vagueness* inherent in the predicates "fertile country" and "horrible world" can lure us into mistakenly thinking that there is a sharp, non-arbitrary line to be drawn to demarcate when such concepts do and do not apply. With respect to horrors, then, God had to draw an

arbitrary line in allowing a vast amount of evils so that persons would realize that something is terribly wrong in the world and be motivated to seek him, as explained above. It seems clear, therefore, that there are cases in which it is morally permissible for an agent to allow an evil that the agent could have prevented, despite the fact that no specific good is achieved by doing so. But then it would seem, if the expanded free will defense is a true story, that this is exactly the moral structure of the situation in which God finds himself when he contemplates a world of horrors which flow as consequences of humanity's separation from him. Yet this means that any individual horror may be due to chance. So, van Inwagen concludes that this defense shows the local argument from evil – the argument from horrors – to be a failure.

Van Inwagen's contribution to debate over the logical (and evidential) arguments from evil calls for further reflection on the evaluation of arguments (perhaps his criterion for a successful argument is too strict) and the role of philosophical arguments in general which go beyond the forensic model.

### Future Directions

Discussions of the logical problem appear to have a lot more life left. After avoiding theodicy for decades, Plantinga (Plantinga 2004) has proposed a *felix culpa* theodicy which shows why Christian believers can be rational in believing that God is compatible with the evils of this world. Based on a line in the *Exultet* which states that Adam's sin was fortunate because it necessitated Christ's redeeming work, Plantinga compares the values of possible worlds, affirming that the finite good of free will and all of the moral goods it makes possible outweigh finite evils and that God's existence in all possible worlds also outweighs all finite evils. But he argues further that there is a contingent good-making feature that makes all worlds that include it far better than any good worlds that do not: the incomparable good of incarnation and atonement. Arguing that God's purpose was to bring about an unsurpassably good world and that sin is a necessary condition for incarnation and atonement, Plantinga concludes that all unsurpassably good worlds also contain sin and evil.

Is the paradoxical lesson here that the value of a salvific relationship with God is so great that it is worth breaking so that God can restore it?! Yet, under scrutiny, there is something mistaken in the claim that, if humanity had not fallen, then we would not have the greatest good of supremely valuable intimacy with God himself. The classical Christian vision of the human *telos* as meant for intimate participation in the divine life entails that God would bring our *telos* to fulfillment even without the Fall. But this means that the conjunction of incarnation and atonement is itself contingent, and that it is not necessary for the greatest good. Granting that the actual world and all other fallen possible worlds contain both incarnation and atonement, incarnation is still possible in unfallen worlds without atonement. Indeed incarnation is likely in such worlds as God reveals himself to humanity and invites humanity to participate in the divine Trinitarian life. Incarnation reveals God's nature and symbolizes that it is forever bonded with human nature. And when God's nature is revealed – through incarnation or other means – it will be the same unrelenting, self-giving, self-sacrificing love demonstrated in incarnation and atonement in the actual world. Clearly, God could have

carried out his original, wonderful plan for humanity in worlds that do not contain sin and atonement. So, it was always possible, and always more desirable, not to sin.

Plantinga also addresses the concern about whether we can show God's goodness at the level of individual persons by trying to attenuate the criticism that God is utilitarian in using human persons for his own glorification. He reasons that persons who are redeemed from sin and persons who suffer can have greater intimacy with God than would otherwise be available in unfallen worlds. But should not strong caution be taken in presuming that the experience of God possessed by redeemed sinners and/or faithful sufferers is somehow of greater value than the experience of those who never sinned or perhaps never suffered? On the one hand, there may be a contingent truth in our world and in at least some other fallen possible worlds that either experiencing redemption or suffering allows a particularly poignant sense of God's presence and inner life. On the other hand, the previous points – about the capacity of incarnation to reveal God's nature without the necessity of sin and atonement, and about God's unchanging plan to bring humans into intimacy with himself – entail that there are no forms of intimacy with God that are fundamental to our humanity and yet attainable only by experiencing suffering or redemption from sin.

Other directions for discussions include John Schellenberg (Schellenberg 2007) who contends, contra Adams, that God, if he exists, would allow a person to experience "horrific suffering" only if doing so is required for that person to experience his/her deepest good (intimate, growing relationship with God); but clearly horrific suffering is not required for any person's deepest good. Marilyn Adams (Adams 2006) has branched into Christology, exploring how Christ is the integrator of positive personal meaning. D. Z. Phillips' (Phillips 2005) ordinary language treatment purports that our talk about God is incoherent, which means not only that the logical problem is misconceived but also that there can be no such being as God. Although we cannot predict with certainty what contributions to the logical problem lie ahead, we can hope that more insightful work will soon be on the horizon.

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## The Evidential Problem of Evil

GRAHAM OPPY

Some theists say that our universe is under the superintendence of, or has been designed by, or has been created by, an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good being (see Chapter 25, Perfect Being Theology; Chapter 27, Ominpotence; Chapter 28, Omniscience; and Chapter 30, Goodness). However, in light of the horrendous suffering that is to be found in our universe – e.g., the rape, torture, and murder of babies and young children, the excruciating suffering and deaths of animals in bushfires and other natural disasters, and so forth – many atheists suppose that there is very good reason to judge that, if there is a being that has sovereignty over our universe, then that being is either unable to prevent horrendous suffering (and hence certainly not omnipotent), or uninformed about the horrendous suffering that there is in our world (and hence certainly not omniscient), or falls far short of moral perfection (because indifferent to the horrendous suffering, or delighting in the horrendous suffering, or whatever).

There are at least two important questions that can be raised in connection with these considerations about horrendous suffering. On the one hand, there are questions about the range of reasonable judgments that can be made concerning the bearing of horrendous suffering on the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good ruler of our universe; and, on the other hand, there are questions about the prospects for the formulation of successful arguments against the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good ruler of our universe on the basis of considerations about the nature and extent of horrendous suffering in our universe.

A number of authors have developed evidential arguments from evil in the past 30 years. Perhaps the best-known evidential arguments from evil are those presented in Rowe (1979) and Draper (1989). We shall spend most of the rest of this chapter examining these two arguments. (Other very well-known presentations of evidential arguments from evil include Schellenberg [1993] and Drange [1998]. A good critical discussion of evidential arguments from evil is contained in Howard-Snyder [1996].)

### Rowe's Evidential Argument from Evil

Recent interest in evidential arguments from evil almost all stems from Rowe (1979).

Rowe has changed his mind about various aspects of his argument in subsequent publications, often in response to criticisms which have been launched against



him. Here, however, we shall just consider the argument as it appears in his initial paper.

The central argument of the paper may be presented as follows:

1. There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse. (premise)
2. An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse. (premise)
3. (Therefore) There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being. (from 1, 2)

Since, as Rowe says, the argument is plainly valid, the only questions which are raised by this argument concern its premises. Each is controversial.

Rowe *claims* that premise 2 is pretty uncontroversial. However, one might think that there could be circumstances in which an omniscient, wholly good being would not prevent the occurrence of some intense suffering which it could prevent, even though it could do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse. Here's how. Suppose that there is an infinite sequence of worlds  $W_1, \dots, W_n, \dots$ . Each world contains a very great good  $G$  whose obtaining in that world depends upon the obtaining of an infinite sequence of evils (where this infinite sequence is the "tail" of the sequence  $E_1, \dots, E_n, \dots$ ). If all – or all but finitely many – of the evils  $E_1$  are prevented from occurring, then the very great good  $G$  cannot obtain. Suppose, further – for reasons which we need not go into – that the best world that a perfect being can make is one of these  $W_1$ . And suppose that the  $W_1$  may be described in the following way:  $W_1$  contains the evils  $E_1, \dots, E_n, \dots$ ;  $W_2$  contains the evils  $E_2, \dots, E_n, \dots$ ;  $W_3$  contains the evils  $E_3, \dots, E_n, \dots$ ;  $W_k$  contains the evils  $E_k, \dots, E_n, \dots$ ; and so on. Then, if the perfect being is to make one of the best worlds that it can make, then it will have to choose one of the  $E_1$ . But, no matter which one it chooses, it will be true that there is an evil ( $E_{1+1}$ ) which is such that the perfect being can prevent it without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse. (For extended discussion of related issues, see Chapter 57, *The Problem of No Best World*.) So, unless one rejects the assumption that there could be worlds like the  $W_1$ , it seems that one should accept that premise 2 is not obviously true. (Perhaps it is enough if one can argue that the possibility which is being here entertained is very remote. However, we shall not attempt to pursue this matter further. Nor shall we worry about other reasons that one might have for finding premise 2 controversial, e.g., the suspicion that it *requires* a non-deontological conception of morality.)

Most of the debate about Rowe's argument has focused on premise 1 and, in particular, on the supporting argument which Rowe gives in attempting to motivate acceptance of premise 1. Here is how Rowe argues:

1. There exist instances of intense suffering for which *we have found* no greater goods which would be lost or evils equally bad or worse which would be permitted if a perfect being were to prevent those instances of suffering. (premise)

2. (Hence) There exist instances of intense suffering for which *there are* no greater goods that would be lost or evils equally bad or worse that would be permitted if a perfect being were to prevent those instances of suffering. (from 1)

Examples of the instances of intense suffering that Rowe has in mind could include the suffering of a fawn trapped in a forest fire or the suffering of a small child who is assaulted and then murdered.

Plainly enough, the argument here is not logically valid: it is – as Rowe acknowledges – possible for the premise to be true and the conclusion false. However, Rowe insists that the premise does nonetheless support the conclusion, in that it provides “rational grounds” for its acceptance. There are various ways in which this claim can be further developed: for instance, in some later publications, Rowe develops the idea in the language of the theory of probability: the point is that our failure to find goods and evils of the kinds in question *greatly raises the likelihood* that there are no such goods and evils. (The likelihood of a hypothesis  $H$ , given evidence  $E$ , is  $\Pr[E/H]$ ; the likelihood of a hypothesis  $H$ , given evidence  $E$  and background knowledge  $k$ , is  $\Pr[E/H\&k]$ . Likelihood should be carefully distinguished from posterior probability:  $\Pr[H/E]$  or  $\Pr[H/E\&k]$ .) It will probably be enough for our purposes to work with a fairly undeveloped notion of “rational grounds.”

Consider the family of arguments of the form, “we have found no  $X$ s, so it is likely that there are no  $X$ s.” Some arguments of this form are strong; some are very weak. One of the features upon which the strength of these arguments depends is the likelihood that we would find  $X$ s if they were there to be found. If it is very unlikely that we should find  $X$ s even if they were there to be found, then our failure to find  $X$ s is not very strong support for the claim that there are no  $X$ s. My failure to spot any methane molecules as I scan my room is not very strong evidence that there are no methane molecules in my room; for, even if there are methane molecules in my room, they will be too small for me to see. So, in the case of Rowe’s argument, it is clearly important to ask whether we should think that it is likely that, if there are goods or evils which justify a perfect being in not preventing certain instances of intense suffering, then we will find those good or evils if we look for them.

Some theists, e.g., Wykstra (1984), claim that it is most unlikely that, if there are goods or evils that justify a perfect being in not preventing certain instances of intense suffering, then we will find those goods or evils if we look for them. Clearly, if there is an omniscient being, it will have cognitive powers which are unimaginable to us. But, if that’s right, then don’t we have good reason to think that it is highly likely that there are hitherto undetected goods or evils that justify a perfect being in not preventing certain instances of intense suffering? Other theists, e.g., Bergmann (2001), claim that we are in no position to assign any likelihood to the claim that, if there are goods or evils which justify a perfect being in not preventing certain instances of intense suffering, then we will find those goods or evils if we look for them. On this – “skeptical theist” – view, Rowe’s supporting argument for premise 1 fails, and so we have not been provided with good grounds for supposing that premise 1 is true.

If we suppose that we have good (independent) reason for thinking that there is an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good being, and if we suppose that premise 2 is true, then we can *infer* that there are hitherto undetected goods or evils that justify a

perfect being in not preventing certain instances of intense suffering. That is, the theist can offer the following counter-argument to Rowe's argument in support of premise 1:

1. There is an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good being.
2. An omniscient wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
3. There exist instances of intense suffering for which *we have found* no greater goods that would be lost or evils equally bad or worse that would be permitted if a perfect being were to prevent those instances of suffering.
4. (Therefore) There are hitherto undetected goods or evils that justify a perfect being in not preventing certain instances of intense suffering.

This argument appears to be valid, and premises 2 and 3 are just the premises which appear in Rowe's original argument and his argument in support of premise 1 of his original argument. So, it might be thought, the "debate" between Rowe and his theistic opponent just comes down to the question of whether to accept the claim that there is an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good being, or whether to accept the claim that there are no hitherto undetected goods or evils that justify a perfect being in not preventing certain instances of intense suffering.

While the above discussion more or less conforms to Rowe's claims about "the G. E. Moore shift" – i.e., the production of the related argument for the conclusion that there are hitherto undetected goods or evils that justify a perfect being in not preventing certain instances of intense suffering – it is not clear to me that this is the best way in which to make the point which Rowe wants to make. What seems right is that how one ought to respond to our failure to find greater goods that would be lost or evils equally bad or worse that would be permitted if a perfect being were to prevent certain instances of suffering depends upon what else one is entitled to believe. If one has independent entitlement to the belief that there is an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being, then one may have good reason for thinking that there are undetected goods or evils that justify a perfect being in not preventing certain instances of intense suffering. On the other hand, if one has independent reasons for thinking that there are no hitherto undetected goods or evils that justify a perfect being in not preventing certain instances of intense suffering, then one may have good reason for thinking that there is no omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being. (Of course, one might have *other* good reasons for thinking that there is no omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being. But that's another story.) Whether either of the above arguments is, in any sense, a good argument seems to me to be a quite separate question – and one which should be answered in the negative, at least if the immediately prior remarks about what theists and atheists may have good reason to believe are well taken.

### Draper's Evidential Argument from Evil

Draper's argument has a forbidding appearance, but it is actually quite straightforward. What Draper aims to establish is that there are certain facts – concerning

observations of sentient beings experiencing pleasure and pain – which are much better explained by what Draper calls “the hypothesis of indifference” than they are by the hypothesis that there is an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect person who made the universe. (“The hypothesis of indifference” says that neither the nature nor the condition of sentient beings on earth is the result of benevolent or malevolent actions performed by nonhuman persons.)

More exactly, Draper’s claim can be explained in the following way. Let *O* be a statement reporting both (i) the observations that one has made of humans and animals experiencing pain and pleasure, and (ii) the testimony one has encountered concerning the observations others have made of sentient beings experiencing pain and pleasure. Let *HI* be the hypothesis of indifference, and let *T* be the theistic hypothesis. Then, according to Draper, the antecedent likelihood of *O* given *HI* is much greater than the antecedent likelihood of *O* given *T*. (The *antecedent* likelihood of evidence *x* given hypothesis *y* is the probability of *x*, independent of the observations and testimony that *x* reports, on the assumption that *y* is true.)

Draper argues for this last contention in the following way. Let *O1*, *O2*, and *O3* be mutually exclusive statements which together report the facts which *O* reports, in the following way:

- O1* reports facts about moral agents experiencing pain and pleasure that we know to be biologically useful.
- O2* reports facts about sentient beings that are not moral agents experiencing pain and pleasure that we know to be biologically useful.
- O3* reports facts about sentient beings experiencing pain and pleasure that we do not know to be biologically useful.

Draper notes, first, that  $\Pr(O/h) = \Pr([O1 \& O2 \& O3]/h)$ . He then goes on to observe that  $\Pr([O1 \& O2 \& O3]/h) = \Pr(O1/h) \cdot \Pr(O2/[h \& O1]) \cdot \Pr(O3/[h \& O1 \& O2])$ . Given this, the claim which he wants to establish – viz. that  $\Pr(O/HI)$  is much greater than  $\Pr(O/T)$  – will be true just in case  $\Pr(O1/HI) \cdot \Pr(O2/[HI \& O1]) \cdot \Pr(O3/[HI \& O1 \& O2])$  is much greater than  $\Pr(O1/T) \cdot \Pr(O2/[T \& O1]) \cdot \Pr(O3/[T \& O1 \& O2])$ . So, if we can argue that  $\Pr(O1/HI)$  is greater than  $\Pr(O1/T)$ , that  $\Pr(O2/[HI \& O1])$  is greater than  $\Pr(O2/[T \& O1])$ , that  $\Pr(O3/[HI \& O1 \& O2])$  is greater than  $\Pr(O3/[T \& O1 \& O2])$ , and that in at least one of these cases, the difference in the values is substantial, then we shall have shown what Draper aims to show.

It might be worth noting that Draper insists that the probabilities which he is talking about are *epistemic* probabilities, and not *statistical*, *physical*, or *logical* probabilities. While Draper says that there is no adequate philosophical theory of epistemic probability, he does “explain” this notion of epistemic probability in the following way: relative to epistemic situation *K*, the proposition that *p* is epistemically more probable than the proposition that *q* just in case any fully rational person in *K* would have a higher degree of belief in the proposition that *p* than in the proposition that *q*. I’m not sure that this “explanation” is much help: the notion of “epistemic” probability is rather obscure, though perhaps well-enough understood for the purposes of Draper’s argument.

We turn now to the argument from cases.

The first claim to be defended is that  $\Pr(O1 / HI)$  is much greater than  $\Pr(O1 / T)$ .  $O1$  reports facts about human beings experiencing pain and pleasure which is known to be biologically useful. So the claim which Draper wants to defend is that it is much more likely that there should be human beings who experience biologically useful pain and pleasure (in the way in which these experiences are actually distributed) if  $HI$  is true than that there should be human beings who experience biologically useful pain and pleasure (in the way in which these experiences are actually distributed) if  $T$  is true. (Roughly speaking, “biologically useful pain and pleasure” is pain and pleasure which makes a causal contribution to survival and reproduction.) Draper’s defense of this claim begins with the observation that pain and pleasure have intrinsic moral value: pain is intrinsically bad, and pleasure is intrinsically good. Draper claims that, while this observation makes no difference to  $\Pr(O1 / HI)$ , it has a substantial impact on  $\Pr(O1 / T)$ . On the one hand, “a biological explanation of pain and pleasure is just the sort of explanation that one would expect on  $HI$ ” (p. 336). On the other hand, “theism entails both that God does not need biologically useful pain and pleasure to produce human goal-directed organic systems and that, if human pain and pleasure exist, then God had good reason for producing them, reasons that, for all we know antecedently, might very well be inconsistent with pain and pleasure systematically contributing to the biological goals of human organisms” (pp. 336–7).

The second claim to be defended is that  $\Pr(O2 / O1 \ \& \ HI)$  is greater than  $\Pr(O2 / O1 \ \& \ T)$ :  $O2$  reports facts about sentient beings that are not moral agents – i.e., young human children and non-human animals – experiencing pain and pleasure which is known to be biologically useful. Draper’s claim is that it is more likely that there should be animals and children who experience biologically useful pain and pleasure (in the way in which these experiences are actually distributed) if  $O1 \ \& \ HI$  is true than that there should be animals and children who experience biologically useful pain and pleasure (in the way in which these experiences are actually distributed) if  $O1 \ \& \ T$  is true. Draper’s defense of this claim turns on the point that, while the pain referred to in  $O1$  might be justified on the grounds that it serves some moral purpose for the subject of that pain, it cannot be that the pain referred to in  $O2$  is justified on these grounds (since the subjects in question are not moral agents). While this point makes no difference to our assessment of the likelihood of  $HI$ , it should lead us to revise down (just a little) our assessment of the likelihood of  $T$ . (“The good moral reasons God has for permitting moral agents to experience pain do not apply to animals that are not moral agents ... [and hence we have] some reason to believe that God will not permit such beings to experience pain” [p. 338])

The third claim to be defended is that  $\Pr(O3 / O2 \ \& \ O1 \ \& \ HI)$  is much greater than  $\Pr(O3 / O2 \ \& \ O1 \ \& \ T)$ :  $O3$  reports facts about sentient beings experiencing pain and pleasure that we do not know to be biologically useful. (Some of this pain and pleasure is known to be biologically gratuitous; some has an uncertain status.) Draper’s claim is that it is much more likely that there should be sentient beings which experience pain and pleasure not known to be biologically useful (in the way in which these experiences are actually distributed) if  $O2 \ \& \ O1 \ \& \ HI$  is true than that there should be sentient beings which experience pain and pleasure not known to be biologically useful (in the way in which these experiences are actually distributed) if  $O2 \ \& \ O1 \ \& \ T$  is true. Draper’s defense

of this claim has two parts. First, Draper argues that we have much more reason to expect sentient beings to be happy on O2 & O1 & T than we do on O2 & O1 & HI. But, when O3 is taken into account “we find that many humans and animals experience prolonged and intense suffering and a much greater number are far from happy” ( p. 338). Moreover, we have much more reason to expect to discover a close connection between certain moral goods and biologically gratuitous pains and pleasures on T than on HI; but we find no such close connection. Second, Draper argues that we have much more reason to believe that the “fundamental role” of pain and pleasure in our world is biological on O2 & O1 & HI than we do on O2 & O1 & T. And when O3 is added to O1 and O2, it appears that the fundamental role of pain and pleasure is biological. For much of the pain and pleasure reported in O3 is either pathological – i.e., results from the failure of some organic system to function properly – or else is biologically appropriate – i.e., occurs in a situation which is such that it is biologically useful that pain or pleasure is felt in situations of this sort. According to Draper, both of these sub-arguments support the main conclusion.

At this point, one might think that – if we grant the case-by-case arguments – we are now in a position to draw the conclusion that  $\Pr(O/HI)$  is much greater than  $\Pr(O/T)$ . But, as Draper observes, in addition to their biological roles, pain and pleasure also have moral roles in our world. It might be that appeal to these moral roles can increase  $\Pr(O/T)$  relative to  $\Pr(O/HI)$  in such a way as to defeat Draper’s arguments.

Draper develops this idea in the following way. Suppose that theism (T) is “expanded” by the addition of a theodicy (Tn) (where we assume that Tn entails T). Then, by another formula of the probability calculus, we have that  $\Pr(O/T) = \Pr(Tn/T) \cdot \Pr(O/Tn) + \Pr(\sim Tn/T) \cdot \Pr(O/T \& \sim Tn)$ . What Draper argued in the previous part of his paper is only that  $\Pr(O/T)$  is much less than  $\Pr(O/HI)$  *prior to considering the effect of theodicies on  $\Pr(O/T)$* . Hence, he claims that, in order to complete his argument, he needs to show that  $\Pr(O/Tn)$  is not significantly greater than  $\Pr(O/T \& \sim Tn)$ .

In order to show that  $\Pr(O/Tn)$  is not significantly greater than  $\Pr(O/T \& \sim Tn)$ , Draper considers three possibilities for Tn, two of which draw upon considerations about freedom of will, and one of which draws upon considerations concerning our limited understanding of omniscient deliberation. While Draper claims that he cannot think of any other plausible candidates, it is worth noting that there are many other theodicies which have been seriously defended. (I omit further discussion of the way in which Draper completes his argument for the claim that  $\Pr(O/T)$  is much less than  $\Pr(O/HI)$  even after considering the effect of theodicies on  $\Pr(O/T)$ .)

Granting Draper everything that he has argued to this point, some may be inclined to object that the difficulty that his argument raises for theism is not particularly disconcerting. In particular, even if it is granted that  $\Pr(O/HI)$  is much greater than  $\Pr(O/T)$ , it does not follow that  $\Pr(HI/\text{total evidence})$  is much greater than  $\Pr(T/\text{total evidence})$ . But, of course, when one is comparing T with its competitors – including HI – one must do so taking all of the relevant available evidence into account. So, one might be tempted to say, we haven’t really been given much of a reason to think that pain and pleasure presents a serious evidential problem for theism.

Draper concludes his paper with four sets of comments which are meant to indicate how hard it is for a theist to find other evidence that “balances out” the evidence that



arises from reports about pain and pleasure. First, Draper contends that HI is not *ad hoc*, and that it is not the case that theism is intrinsically more probable than HI (see Chapter 53, The Presumption of Atheism). Second, Draper contends that arguments for theism are “far from compelling.” Third, Draper contends that, in the case of many arguments for theism, even if those arguments are compelling, they fail to establish that there is a morally perfect being. Finally, Draper contends that the evidence of “religious experience” is, at best, ambiguous evidence for the moral attributes of the creator (see Chapter 48, Religious Experience).

The status of these comments varies. I think that there are few “compelling” arguments in philosophy, and hence that there is some substance to the second and third claims. However, I also think that one can be rational in one’s believing even though one cannot offer “compelling” arguments in support of one’s beliefs. More generally, I think that there is a presumption that the beliefs of thoughtful, rational, and reflective people should be judged to be reasonable unless there are really good reasons to think otherwise. In the case of contested beliefs – e.g., beliefs about the existence of a perfect being – I think that there is a presumption that it can be reasonable to take any of the views which are taken by thoughtful, rational and reflective people. So – regardless of the strength of the arguments which are produced on either side – I think that there is a presumption that it can be reasonable to be a theist, and it can be reasonable to be an atheist. However, when we think about how Draper’s claims look from the standpoint of one who believes that there is a perfect being, the first and the fourth points which he makes seem highly contestable. Theism doubtless does appear “intrinsically more probable” than HI from the standpoint of theists, and the “evidence of religious experience” doubtless does appear to yield unambiguous evidence of the moral attributes of the creator from the standpoint of theists.

Thus, even if there is nothing to dispute in the details of Draper’s argument, I find it very hard to believe that it is a successful argument against belief in a perfect being: his argument does not show that, by their own lights, reasonable, reflective, and well-informed theists have good reason to give up their theistic beliefs. Moreover – though I shall not go on to explore these matters further – there are doubts which can be raised about various points of detail in Draper’s argument.

## Concluding Remarks

As I noted initially, there is now a vast literature on evidential arguments from evil. We have looked at two papers which develop evidential arguments from evil; we have barely scratched the surface of discussion even of these two papers. However, even our brief discussion shows, I think, that one cannot give an adequate discussion of evidential arguments from evil unless one is prepared to think seriously about the range of reasonable judgments that can be made concerning the bearing of horrendous suffering on the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good ruler of our universe. But, in my view at least, this latter topic is one that, in recent discussions of evidential arguments from evil, has not been given the prominence that it deserves.



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## Divine Hiddenness

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### Introduction and Background

Though others have spoken of “divine hiddenness” or the “hiddenness of God” differently, contemporary philosophers who employ such expressions usually have in mind either (1) that the available relevant evidence makes the existence of God uncertain or (2) that many individuals or groups of people *feel* uncertain about the existence of God, or else never mentally engage the idea of God at all. The first sort of hiddenness may be called *objective* and the second *subjective*. Of course there are various possible connections between these two, and both may consistently be affirmed.

Many in philosophy’s history would have been prepared to admit the existence of objective or subjective divine hiddenness or both. But only a few – see Nietzsche 1982 [1881] and Hepburn 1963 for the clearest examples – have noticed that such an admission can provide the basis for a distinctive objection to theistic belief. And only in recent years has serious discussion of this objection begun (Schellenberg 1993 contains the first fully worked-out and defended argument for atheism from hiddenness-related facts). Is it surprising that a thorough treatment of the hiddenness challenge to theism should have been so long delayed?

Perhaps this can be made unsurprising. First, notice that talk of “divine hiddenness” or the “hiddenness of God” originates in contexts of unquestioning *belief* – think only of the Hebrew psalmist’s laments. In such contexts it is natural to take hiddenness talk literally, and thus to conjoin such propositions as (1) or (2) above with the claim that God is the *source* of the phenomenon in question. There can hardly be a challenge to theism from divine hiddenness if the latter is thought of as entailing the existence of God! Second, until recently, many humans have been inclined to think of a certain relational distance as a perfectly unexceptionable feature of masculinity, and also to think of God in exclusively masculine terms. This, together with the commonness of references in theology to God as hidden, has made it possible for thinkers to be unmoved by facts falling under (1) and (2) above (see Chapter 81, Feminism). Third, although there have been suggestions in the history of philosophy as to how God’s existence might be more fully revealed, these have usually been stated in fairly crude ways. An “in your face” sort of God is imagined writing his name in the stars or performing some other hugely impressive feat aimed at making his existence overwhelmingly obvious

(see, for example, Hume 1946 [1779] and Hanson 1976). These suggestions have been easy for critics to resist or even dismiss, and in their haste such critics have overlooked better, more sensitive suggestions as to what hiddenness is and how it might be removed. Fourth, the hiddenness problem is easily lost within the problem of evil; many have hazily assumed that discussion of the latter takes care of the former as well (see Chapter 58, The Logical Problem of Evil; and Chapter 59, The Evidential Problem of Evil). Finally, we should remember the rising tide of secularism, which was not always with us. This complex phenomenon has brought with it much *more* uncertainty about the existence of God than once existed and, correspondingly, more of a chance for talk of “hiddenness” to arise in new, non-literal forms that *both* believers and non-believers utilize – from which usage the idea of a hiddenness argument for atheism can grow.

### The Contemporary Scene: Versions of the Hiddenness Problem

So where is the discussion today? Five main ways of developing the hiddenness problem in philosophy have been suggested so far, though attention has been concentrated on the first.

- (1) *It has been suggested that an essential property of God is perfect love, and that a perfectly loving God would from relational motives prevent non-resistant non-belief, which nonetheless exists* (Schellenberg 1993, 2007). The suggestion here is that an unsurpassably great personal reality could not but be perfectly loving, and that perfect love is open to relationship in a manner whose consequences in the divine case have not been appreciated (see Chapter 25, Perfect Being Theology; and Chapter 16, Personalism). Possessed of perfect love and unconstrained by the limitations of finitude, a personal God would ensure that anyone capable of a meaningful, conscious relationship with the divine and not resistant to it was always in a position to enter into such a relationship at some level. Now, this cannot be the case unless all creatures who are capable and non-resistant always *believe in the existence of God*, for such belief is a necessary condition of being in the position just described. (Their belief need not be a response to spectacular miracles but might, for example, be the natural consequence of inner experiences of God’s presence of the sort theistic writers themselves describe and defend, generally distributed and modulated according to the needs of believers.) Hence the fact that there are instead, and always have been, many non-resistant *non-believers* is an indication that there is no God. Evidently it is subjective hiddenness that is front and center in this first version of the problem, and the argument form is deductive. The argument stakes a lot on its claim about the implications of divine love, but if correct it yields considerable enlightenment concerning the nature and prospects of theism.
- (2) *It has been suggested that, instead of reasoning from non-resistant non-belief in general, and on grounds of perfect love alone, the atheist can argue from any or all of at least four distinguishable types of non-resistant non-belief, appealing to various aspects of the perfect moral character a God must display* (Schellenberg 2007). Some non-resistant non-believers are former believers; some lifelong seekers. Others are converts to

nontheistic religion; and still others isolated nontheists. And drawing on considerations about responsiveness and caring, non-capriciousness and justice, faithfulness, generosity, truthfulness, non-deceptiveness, and providence, so this argument claims, we can show the difficulty of squaring the existence of God with each of these types of non-resistant non-belief (see Chapter 30, Goodness; and Chapter 39, Providence). For why, if a God of perfect moral character exists, should we have onetime believers trying to make their way home without being able to do so; or dedicated seekers failing to find, or taking themselves to have found a truth that only enmeshes them in a meaning system distortive of what must, if God exists, *be* the truth; or individuals being entirely formed by a fundamentally misleading meaning system? Some of the arguments involved here are deductive, and some proceed inductively – for example, by analogy with the behavior of human parents.

- (3) *It has been suggested, in an argument directed specifically to evangelical Christian theism, that if the God of evangelical Christianity were to exist, all, or almost all, humans since the time of Jesus would have come to believe the gospel message by the time of their physical deaths, and yet many have not* (this is the central argument of Drange 1998). Here too it is a kind of subjective hiddenness that is considered problematic, and the form of argument is deductive, as under (1). The suspicion is that a hiddenness argument will be most effective if directed to a specific theological tradition. Given its influence in the world, it is perhaps not surprising that Drange concentrates on evangelical Christianity. On this approach, one may note, it is unnecessary to argue for perfect love as an essential property of God or for a connection between such love and the availability of a divine-creature relationship or for a connection between such a relationship and creaturely belief in God. All that is needed are some evangelical assumptions. On the other hand, this argument – like other, similar arguments Drange supplies for different theological traditions – makes itself a hostage to religious assumptions and to religious reinterpretations thereof.
- (4) *It has been suggested that hiddenness considerations may be added to, and might turn out to strengthen, a wide cumulative case meant inductively to confirm the non-existence of God* (Draper 2002; see also Chapter 49, Cumulative Cases). Though Draper has Schellenberg's argument in mind when contemplating the implications of hiddenness, he is really thinking about *objective* hiddenness rather than subjective. On his view, the evidence relevant to the dispute between theism and the (atheism-entailing) position of naturalism is objectively indecisive; each side has clear evidence that is "offset" by clear evidence on the other side. This indecisiveness Draper describes in terms of the "ambiguity" of the total available evidence. Now, such objective hiddenness may be more difficult to establish than the subjective variety, for ambiguity judgments will be contested even where non-resistant doubt and non-belief are admitted. But if it can be established, a new form of reasoning is possible. This is what interests Draper. He takes Schellenberg to be saying (as Hepburn 1963 in fact does) that objective hiddenness is self-removing: that if we add ambiguity itself to our evidence, the latter will no longer be ambiguous but rather evidence overall confirming atheism. Draper does not himself believe that this move works, for even after assuming – as reason may not force

us to do – that ambiguity is less likely on the assumption of theism than on the assumption of naturalism and adding this supposed evidence to the mix, it remains unclear, so he claims, that the evidence on the one side is stronger than the evidence on the other, and thus we are still left, overall, with ambiguity. Nonetheless, Draper identifies a distinctive manner in which a hiddenness argument might be deployed, whether within such a broader atheistic case as he describes or alone, and whether as a decisive or only as a contributing factor in the defense of atheism: the way to proceed, he suggests, is to show how much more likely it is that hiddenness-related facts should be found on the assumption of naturalism than it is on the assumption of theism.

- (5) *It has been suggested, in a special instance of the Draper-style approach, that the uneven distribution of theistic belief in the world is much more likely on naturalism than on theism* (Maitzen 2006). Here subjective hiddenness is once more at issue, but Maitzen abstracts from individuals to large-scale facts about non-belief. Why, he asks, should the demographics of theism be such that (e.g.) residents of Thailand experience 20 times the rate of non-belief experienced by residents of Saudi Arabia? This is rather difficult to explain on theism, with its loving and (so) relationship-seeking God, but it is just what we would expect if such natural forces as culture and politics alone were at work. His argument, Maitzen suggests, is immune to the usual objections. For example, human defectiveness – often appealed to by theists to explain hiddenness – could hardly be expected to vary so dramatically with cultural and geographical boundaries (see Chapter 61, *Naturalistic Explanations of Theistic Belief*). Moreover, here we can identify a clear difference between the hiddenness problem and the problem of evil: the usual responses to the problem of evil mention features quite uniformly distributed among the human populace, such as free will, and arguably predict a similar uniformity for what they seek to explain, such as the subjective experience of suffering. But non-belief is anything but uniformly distributed, and so it is hard to see how responses like the free will theodicy can effectively come to grips with it. How strong a conclusion Maitzen's reasoning will support is not yet clear, but his work reminds us of the variety of forms hiddenness argumentation can take – a variety that may yet have more of itself to reveal.

## The Hiddenness Problem and the Problem of Evil

As indicated above, the hiddenness problem has seemed to some to be assimilable to the problem of evil. We have also just encountered a suggestion to the effect that these two problems are importantly distinguishable. So what *are* the relations between the two problems? Does the concern of hiddenness arguers, for example, come down to a concern about evil by reducing to concern over some form of pain or suffering? Pretty clearly, no. Even where non-resistant non-belief takes the form of doubt (it doesn't always), and where doubt is distressing, it need not be this *distress* that captures the attention of the hiddenness arguer. It may just as well be the conflict between doubt and belief, and the motivations of love that would lead God to facilitate belief and prevent doubt, whether distress is occasioned by the latter or not.

Could we still say, a bit more generally, that both the hiddenness problem and the problem of evil focus on the *badness* of certain things in a way that makes the former assimilable to the latter? This may initially seem plausible, but reflection suggests otherwise. A theist may keenly feel the value of (what she takes to be) an existing relationship with God and may therefore be inclined to view anything contributing to its absence, such as non-belief, as a bad thing. But the atheist would be quite content were we all to recognize that, given certain definitional facts about “love,” the situation of hiddenness is in conflict with the idea that a God of *fullest love* exists, as opposed to feeling that hiddenness represents something bad that a benevolent or morally perfect God would resist. (A similar distinction is made by Drange [1998] in his discussion of differences between the two problems.) If love is an essential property of God, then such recognition is all we need to ground a hiddenness argument against the existence of God. What is distinctive about the argument from evil is that it instead appeals to the existence of things we would not expect from benevolence or moral impeccability *because they are bad*. Hence, it is not appropriate to regard these two problems as sharing a focus on badness.

It is important that we see this, if only to avoid the confusion exemplified by those who wonder why anyone would put forward an argument from, say, non-resistant non-belief when it is obvious that God can be revealed to all of us in a happy afterlife and can be good to us even now in ways not involving self-revelation. The wonderment here depends on supposing that the hiddenness arguer is saying there is something deeply *bad* about a life even temporarily bereft of the opportunity for conscious acquaintance with God. And that is not what she is saying. Rather she appeals, again, to facts about love, which by its very nature, so she may claim, opens itself to relationship with those loved.

But the assimilationist still has one more trick up her sleeve: surely both problems do focus on things apparently contrary to the moral character of God, and thus they are broadly of the same type! Suppose so. By this point we have arrived at a similarity so general as to be useless to the assimilationist's case. To say that because the hiddenness argument argues from things apparently contrary to the moral character of God, the hiddenness argument is reducible to the argument from evil, would be like saying that because the theistic teleological argument argues from things contingent, the teleological argument is reducible to the cosmological argument. The latter claim is unconvincing, and so – for the same reason – is the former.

Two other possible relations between the hiddenness problem and the problem of evil may briefly be explored. Notice, first, how it may be thought that the problem of evil *generates* the hiddenness problem. After all, evil is often taken as evidence against theism contributing to evidential ambiguity, and many are in doubt about God precisely because of facts about evil. But we should be careful here not to conflate non-resistant non-belief with one of its species: *conscious, reflective non-resistant doubt or disbelief*. We are overintellectualizing if we do, forgetting the types of non-resistant non-belief, mentioned earlier, that do not involve reflection and so do not involve reflection on the problem of evil. Turning to objective hiddenness: if there were no evil, or no unjustified evil, the possibility of indecisive evidence might remain because of the force of *other* arguments against the existence of God (including arguments from subjective hiddenness!) or because of the failure of arguments *for* the existence of God. Any



connection here between the problem of evil and the problem of hiddenness is contingent and limited.

Must evil be much stronger evidence for atheism than hiddenness? Some have been inclined to say so (see, for example, Howard-Snyder 2005). But their assumption seems to be that, in this context, strength of evidence can be measured along but one dimension: degree of badness. And this assumption is false. Horrific suffering is indeed worse than hiddenness. Indeed, as we have seen, the atheist need not regard the latter as bad at all. But something not at all bad or even good might prove the non-existence of God if God's existence were incompatible with it, thus representing atheistic evidence as strong as there could be. Imagine knowing that God necessarily would create a world with a certain good characteristic *A* and that this rules out God's creating a world with a certain good characteristic *B*. Now suppose you discover that our world has goodness *B*. You would then have a basis from which to mount an impeccable deductive argument from goodness *B* to the non-existence of God. Thus the lack of any opportunity of appealing to things horrifying when developing the hiddenness argument does not in any way reveal that argument to be weaker than the argument from evil. (For more on the relation between the problem of evil and the hiddenness discussion, see Schellenberg, forthcoming.)

### The Contemporary Scene: Attempts to Solve the Hiddenness Problem

The hiddenness problem in its various forms is, as we have seen, its own problem, requiring its own solutions, and there is no shortage of suggestions as to what the latter might be. (Actually, most of the suggestions that have been raised so far are aimed at the original Schellenberg version of the problem, and it would take additional argument to show that they apply to the other versions as well.) Though few historical figures have recognized the atheistic potential of hiddenness, a number – Pascal, Kierkegaard, Butler, and others – developed ideas that have seemed to some of those seeking a solution to the hiddenness problem to be worthy of adapting for this purpose. The solutions explicitly developed so far, whether from some such historical source of inspiration or otherwise, fall into four broad categories. Each has a central idea that follows naturally from that of the previous category.

- (1) *Attempts to show that hiddenness does not obtain in the first place.* Some writers think we accede too easily to the idea that there really are non-resistant non-believers in the world. They argue that sinful rejection of God, sometimes cleverly disguised, may be quite common (Henry 2001; Moser 2008; Wainwright 2002; Lehe 2004; and Evans 2006). One response is that such a solution overlooks the non-resistant non-belief of individuals and groups, in various places and times, who do not have so much as a good grasp of the concept of divinity involved here; another is that many doubters deeply wish to believe in a manner that makes hidden resistance quite unlikely (Schellenberg 2004 and 2005b). Considered somewhat differently, this first approach might be seen as applying to objective hiddenness; one could, for example, question whether Draper's objective ambiguity obtains. However, it



is hard to see how it might seriously be thought to undermine our acceptance of the distinctive subjective facts appealed to by Drange and Maitzen.

- (2) *Attempts to show that, even if it does obtain, hiddenness need not be a barrier to personal relationship with God, since such relationship can exist in the absence of our belief in God.* Some arguments in this category develop the idea – an application of conceptual work on religious attitudes done by Alston (1996) and Schellenberg (2005a) – that a beliefless sort of acceptance or faith might, in a relationship with God, substitute for belief, so that such a relationship is not really ruled out by the unavailability of belief (Jordan 2006; Dougherty and Poston 2007; Aijaz and Weidler 2007; see also Chapter 52, Fideism; and Chapter 67, The Ethics of Religious Commitment). Others (see Cullison, forthcoming) suggest ways in which even a belief-like state may be unnecessary. A possible response is that such maneuvers are in danger of equivocating on “personal relationship,” at critical moments ignoring what this term really means in the context of hiddenness argumentation (for what it really means, see version 1 of the hiddenness problem above). A related point is that they are in danger of missing the connection between hiddenness concerns and the motives of love, substituting for the latter a purely instrumental concern with the well-being of creatures and mistakenly thinking they can reach their goal simply by showing one form of relationship to be as *beneficial* as another. For such reasons, it can be argued that the present solution is unable to stand on its own two feet but needs to be propped up by a solution of the sort outlined under (3) below, which faces the task of showing that God might at some time settle for something less than what genuine love will naturally seek to facilitate (Schellenberg 2007).
- (3) *Attempts to show that, even supposing hiddenness is a barrier to a relationship with God, a perfectly loving God would have good reasons for permitting hiddenness to occur.* Discussion of this strategy is much in evidence in the contemporary literature. It begins in earnest with Schellenberg 1993, which systematically and with attention to historical precedent discusses some 15 such replies to the hiddenness argument, finding none successful, and it continues in the attempts of various critics to deepen or extend these replies. Representative of the goods that have been suggested by critics as sufficient to move even a perfectly loving God to remain distant, at least for a time, are the following: avoidance of rebuff from the non-resistant but ill-disposed, who by responding negatively to God upon coming to believe would only confirm themselves in bad dispositions (Howard-Snyder 1996; see also Garcia 2002 and Tucker 2008); the possibility of discovering God’s existence through individual and cooperative investigation, as well as genuine freedom to choose the bad (Swinburne 1998, Murray 2002); the opportunity for humans to mature to the point where a revelation of God would do individuals more personal good than it can do us now (McKim 2001); a chance to develop deep longing for God as well as the motivation, supplied by struggling with doubt, to remove deficiencies in oneself (Lehe 2004); and the opportunity to exhibit a noble sort of courage or love that sacrifices itself for the good even where no belief in the possibility of a happy afterlife exists to diminish its value (Cullison, forthcoming).

All of the reasons for hiddenness here identified are in some way about moral or spiritual or intellectual development. One response with which they must

contend is that there seem to be many ways in which, given the infinite richness and depth of any God there may be, the goods associated with such development can be accommodated *within* explicit relationship with God – which would itself be capable of an indefinite degree of development, with always more to discover and overcome for one who participated in it (Schellenberg 2007). What the points here listed provide us with reason to suppose God would value are invariably broad *types* of things – such as courage – that can be tokened in various ways, and also in relationship with God; and given the connection between love and openness to relationship, we should not expect God to give up the latter unless these types cannot otherwise be tokened. There is also a way of deepening this response, one which enables the hiddenness arguer to deal even with those goods from the list that most seem to require the absence of belief in God's existence. This returns us to the original meaning of "divine hiddenness," reminding us that there is a kind of divine *withdrawal* that can occur within relationship with God – the "dark night of the soul" *after* belief which, especially in its emotional effects, may readily substitute for doubt *prior* to belief in the production of such goods (Schellenberg 1993, 2007).

It should also be noted that reasons for hiddenness such as those given here are apparently not so much as applicable to the data emphasized by the Maitzen demographics argument. We would expect these reasons to apply evenly to human beings, if at all, so they are poorly suited to an explanation of the dramatically *uneven* distribution of theistic believers.

- (4) *Attempts to show that, even if the available reasons for hiddenness fail, there may yet be good reasons we don't know about for God to permit hiddenness.* Lacking convincing goods we know about, theistic critics sometimes turn to goods we don't know about (see, for example, McKim 2001 and Howard-Snyder 2005), thus evincing what Draper (1996) has called skeptical theism. Would it really be surprising if there were such unknown goods, given our cognitive limitations? But it is hard to avoid begging the question here. If a case has been made, say, for the claim that a perfectly loving God would necessarily be open to explicit relationship in the manner that a hiddenness argument emphasizes, then unknown reasons *would* be surprising, for their absence is implied by what has been shown. Thus it appears that the solution in question must assume that such a case has not been made – which is to beg the question. Perhaps such a reply is not available to non-deductive versions of the hiddenness argument, but other replies that are relevant have been suggested in the ongoing dispute over skeptical theism in connection with the problem of evil (see, for example, Draper 1996 and Drange 1998).

All in all, it is clear that the hiddenness problem has become a focus of exciting and lively discussion in philosophy of religion. Featuring a discussion less than two decades old, this whole area is ripe for new developments.

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## Naturalistic Explanations of Theistic Belief

KAI NIELSEN

Naturalism denies that there are any spiritual or supernatural realities. There are, that is, no purely mental substances and there are no supernatural realities transcendent to the world; or at least we have no sound grounds for believing that there are such realities or perhaps even for believing that there could be such realities. It is the view that anything that exists is ultimately made up of physical components.

Naturalism sometimes has been reductionistic (claiming that all talk of the mental can be translated into purely physicalist terms) or scientistic (claiming that what science cannot tell us humankind cannot know). The more plausible forms of naturalism are neither across-the-board reductionistic nor scientistic (Nielsen 1996, ch. 1). Most claims that people make are not scientific; yet they can, for all that, be true or false. Many of them are quite plainly and uncontroversially in place. That it snows in Ontario in winter, that people very frequently fear death, and that keeping promises is generally speaking a desirable thing are some unproblematic examples. And very frequently mentalistic talk in terms of intentions, thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and the like is not only useful, but indispensable if we are to make sense of human life and of the interactions between people. Such remarks are typically true or false and again sometimes unproblematically so. But such talk is, for the most part, hardly scientific, though from this, of course, it does not follow that it is anti-scientific – it is just non-scientific. There we are, however, still talking, under different descriptions, about the same physical realities as we are when we give macroscopic descriptions of bodily movements, though in using the mental terms we are usually talking for a different purpose and from a different perspective. These descriptions are different, and usefully so, but, all the same, only one kind of reality is being described, namely physical reality. There are no *purely* mental realities in a naturalistic account of the world.

Religions, whether theisms or not, are belief-systems (though that is not all that they are) which involve belief in spiritual realities. Even Theravada Buddhism, which has neither God nor worship, has a belief in spiritual realities; this is incompatible with naturalism, as also is theism which is a form of supernaturalism (see Chapter 2, Buddhism). Naturalism, where consistent, is an atheism. It need not be a militant atheism and it should not be dogmatic: it should not claim that it is certain that theism is either false or incoherent. Yet, unlike an agnostic, a naturalist, if she is consistent, will be an atheist arguing, or at least presupposing, that theism is either false or

incoherent or in some other way thoroughly unbelievable. But naturalists will argue for atheism in a fallibilistic, and *sometimes* even in a moderately skeptical, manner: one that is characteristic of modernity or of the peculiar form of modernity that some call postmodernity.

Atheism has a *critical* side and an *explanatory* side. (With many naturalistic theorists, atheists engage in both of these tasks. And sometimes it is not as clear as it should be which they are doing.) The critical side is classically exemplified in the works of Baron d'Holbach, Thomas Hobbes, Pierre Bayle, and most profoundly in those of David Hume, and in our period by the works of (among others) Axel Hägerström, Bertrand Russell, J. L. Mackie, Wallace Matson, Paul Kurtz, Richard Robinson, Ingemar Hedenius, Kai Nielsen, William L. Rowe, Antony Flew (see Chapter 53, *The Presumption of Atheism*), and Michael Martin (see Chapter 54, *The Verificationist Challenge*; and Chapter 55, *Theism and Incoherence*). Such an atheism gives, in one way or another, grounds for the rejection of all belief in supernatural or spiritual beings and with that, of course, a rejection of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam with their common belief in a God who created the universe out of nothing and has absolute sovereignty over his creation (see Chapter 37, *Creation and Conservation*).

It will also be the case that naturalistic explanations will become of paramount interest only when the critique of theism has been thought to have done its work. Karl Marx's and Sigmund Freud's accounts of religion, as they were themselves well aware, gain the considerable significance they have only after we have come to believe that the Enlightenment critiques of religion by Bayle and Hume, perhaps with a little contemporary rational reconstruction, have successfully done their work. But it is not implausible to think that in our situation, coming down to us from the Enlightenment, there is what in effect is a cumulative argument (more literally a cluster of arguments with many strands and a complex development) against theism that has with time increased in force (Nielsen 1996). Starting with the early Enlightenment figures, finding acute and more fully developed critiques in Hume and Kant (see Chapter 12, *Early Modern Philosophical Theology on the Continent*; and Chapter 13, *Early Modern Philosophical Theology in Great Britain*), and carried through by their contemporary rational reconstructers (e.g., Mackie and Martin), the various arguments for the existence of God, including appeals to religious experience (see Chapter 48, *Religious Experience*), have been so thoroughly refuted that few would try to defend them today and even those few that do, do so in increasingly attenuated forms. The move has increasingly been in religious apologetic to an appeal to faith (see Chapter 52, *Fideism*; Chapter 19, *Wittgenstein*; and Chapter 77, *Wittgensteinian Philosophy of Religion*) or to arguments that claim that without belief in God life would be meaningless or morality groundless (see Chapter 45, *Moral Arguments*): that is, that naturalism leads to nihilism or despair.

Naturalists in turn point to the fact that such theistic responses do not face the fact that a perfectly reasonable and morally compelling secular sense can be made of morality, that alleged revelations and faiths are many and not infrequently conflicting, and moreover, and distinctively, that the very concept of God is problematical. To turn to the part about problematicity, where the theisms are plainly anthropomorphic, where we have something like a belief in a Zeus-like God, then religious claims are plainly false. Where theisms, by contrast, are more theologically elaborated and the religion,



at least in that sense, is more developed, theistic religions move away from anthropomorphism to a more spiritualistic conception of God, for example, "God is Pure Spirit," "God is not a being but Being as such," "God is the mysterious ground of the universe." But with this turn (an understandable turn for theism to take given the pressure of philosophical thought, science, and secular outlooks) religious claims, though becoming thereby not so clearly, or perhaps not even at all, falsifiable, are threatened with incoherence.

As we move away from anthropomorphism to claims that God is an unlimited, ultimate Being transcendent to the universe, we no longer understand to *whom* or to *what* the term "God" refers. If we try to think literally here we have no hold on the idea of "a being or Being that is transcendent to the universe." And to try to treat it metaphorically is (1) to provoke the question *what* is it a metaphor of, and (2) to lose the putatively substantive nature of the claim. God, in evolved forms of theism, is said to be an infinite individual who created the universe out of nothing and who is distinct from the universe. But such a notion is so problematical as to be at least arguably incoherent (Nielsen 1996, ch. 14). So construed, there could be no standing in the presence of God, no divine encounters, and no experiencing God in our lives. With anthropomorphism we get falsification; without it we get at least apparent incoherence and religious irrelevance.

At the core of theistic belief there is a metaphysical belief in a reality that is alleged to transcend the empirical world. It is the metaphysical belief that there is an eternal (see Chapter 32, Eternity), ever-present, creative source and sustainer of the universe. The problem is how it is possible to know or even reasonably to believe that such a reality exists, or even to understand what such talk is about. Naturalists believe that if we continue to try to see through *Judeo-Christian spectacles*, there is nothing to understand here. We are faced with the hopeless task of trying to make sense out of an incoherent something, we know not what. Yet religious belief, much of which in one way or another is theistic belief, is culturally speaking pervasive even with the continuing disenchantment of the world.

Many contemporary naturalists believe that with the critical work – the critique of the truth-claims of theism – essentially done by Hume, we should turn, setting both metaphysical speculation and fideistic *angst* aside, to naturalistic explanations of religious beliefs. The main players here from the nineteenth century are Ludwig Feuerbach, Friedrich Engels, Karl Marx, Max Stirner, and Friedrich Nietzsche; and from the twentieth century, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Axel Hägerström, Sigmund Freud, Bronislaw Malinowski, and Antonio Gramsci. Their accounts, although varied, are all thoroughly naturalistic.

These naturalists assume that by now it has been well established that there are no sound reasons for religious beliefs: there is no reasonable possibility of establishing religious beliefs to be true; there is no such thing as religious knowledge or sound religious belief. But when there are no good reasons, and when that fact is, as well, tolerably plain to informed and impartial persons, not crippled by ideology or neurosis, and yet religious belief (a belief that is both widespread and tenacious) persists in our cultural life, then it is time to look for the *causes* – causes which are not also reasons – of religious belief, including the causes of its widespread psychological appeal for many people. And indeed, given the importance of religious beliefs in the lives of most



human beings, it is of crucial importance to look for such causes. Here questions about the origin and functions of religion become central, along with questions about the logical or conceptual status of religious beliefs.

Let us see how some of this goes by starting with Feuerbach and then, going to our century, moving on to Freud. (We will later turn to other such naturalists.) For Feuerbach religion is the projected image of humanity's essential nature. To understand what religion properly is, its explanation and elucidation must be taken out of the hands of theology and turned over to anthropology. Feuerbach sees himself, vis-à-vis religion, as changing profoundly the very way things are viewed and reacted to, changing religion's very object, as it is in the believer's imagination, into a conception of the object as it is in reality, namely that God is really the species-being (the idealized essence) of human beings rather than some utterly mysterious supernatural power. To talk about God, for him, is to talk about human beings *so idealized*.

Freud also discusses religion in psychological and anthropological terms. Religion in reality is a kind of mass obsessional delusion; though for understandable and often very emotionally compelling reasons, it is, of course, not recognized as such by believers, or at least not clearly and stably so. What religious beliefs and practices in reality do, according to Freud, is to depress the value of life and distort "the picture of the real world in a delusional manner" – which, Freud has it, comes to "an intimidation of the intelligence." By so functioning, religion has succeeded in "sparing many people an individual neurosis. But hardly anything more" (Freud 1930, pp. 31–2). Religion, on Freud's account, is the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity. It emerges out of the Oedipus complex – out of the helpless child's relation to what understandably seems to the child an all-powerful father. "God," Freud tells us, "is the exalted father and the longing for the father is the root of the need for religion" (Freud 1957, p. 36). Religious beliefs and doctrines "are not the residue of experience or the final result of reflection; they are illusions, fulfillment of the oldest, strongest and most insistent wishes of mankind; the secret of their strength is the strength of these wishes" (p. 51).

In many circumstances of life we are battered and to some considerable extent helpless. Faced with this helplessness, we unconsciously revert to how we felt and reacted as infants and very young children when, quite unavoidably, given the kind of creatures we are, we were subject to a long period of infantile dependence – a period when we were utterly helpless – and, given the sense of security that we need because of this helplessness, we develop a father-longing. We need someone who will protect us. Freud believes that human beings come to believe that this is what the father does. Coming to recognize in later life that our fathers are by no means perfect protectors, nor could they be even with the best of motivations, we, in a world replete with threatening circumstances that we cannot control, unconsciously revert to our infantile attitudes and create the gods (Freud 1957, p. 27). Thus religion functions to exorcize the terrors of nature, to reconcile us to the "cruelty of fate, particularly as shown in death" and to "make amends for the sufferings and privations that the communal life of culture has imposed on man" (p. 27). To speak of God is in reality not to speak, as believers believe, of a supernatural creator and sustainer of the world – there are no such spiritual realities – but of an imagined idealized father, all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good, who deeply cares for us and who can and will protect us (see Chapter 28, Omniscience; Chapter 27, Omnipotence; and Chapter 30, Goodness).

For Feuerbach and Freud religious ideas were about psychological-anthropological realities. There is a stylized, and I believe a misleading, difference (alleged difference) characteristically thought to obtain between them and Engels, Marx, and Durkheim. For the latter, by contrast with Feuerbach and Freud, religion is taken instead to be about *society* – about social realities. For Marx all pre-Communist societies are class societies, driven by class struggles, where the class structures are epoch-specific and are rooted in the material conditions of production. Religions, in his and Engels' conception, function principally to aid the dominant class or classes in mystifying and, through such mystification, controlling the dominated classes in the interests of the dominant class or classes. Members of the dominating classes may or may not be aware that religion functions that way. But, whether they are aware of it or not, it so functions. Religion, as ideology, serves to reconcile the dominated to their condition and to give them an illusory hope of a better purely spiritual world to come, after they depart this vale of tears. This works, in the interests of the dominant class or classes, as a device to pacify what otherwise might be a rebellious dominated class, while at the same time "legitimizing" the wealth and other privileges of the dominating class or classes. In this peculiar way – definitely an ideological way – religion works to "unify" class society, while at the same time giving expression to distinctive class interests. It serves, that is, both to "unify" class society and to sanction class domination, while giving the dominated class an illusory hope of a better life to come after the grave (Marx and Engels 1958; Nielsen 1996, ch. 15).

Durkheim, though in a rather different way, also saw religion as unifying society. In his view, however, it *genuinely* unified society. As Steven Lukes put it, Durkheim "saw religion as social in at least three broad ways: as socially determined, as embodying representations of social realities, and as having functional social consequences" (Lukes 1985, p. 462). In all these ways, talk of God is in reality talk about society, but they are nonetheless different ways and only the part about embodying representations of social realities is *necessarily* naturalistic. However, if a naturalistic turn is taken, questions about the social determination and the social function of religion, rather than questions about the truth of religious beliefs, come to the forefront, gaining a pertinence that they did not have before. Still, (1) questions about what are the causes of religious beliefs and practices and what sustains them, (2) questions about the role they play in the life of human beings, and (3) questions about their truth should be kept apart, though admittedly (1) and (2) are intertwined. But at least initially, they should be held apart in our thinking about them and examined separately.

Durkheim sought to give an utterly naturalistic account of what we are talking about when we speak of God. God and the religious beings of other religious systems "are nothing other than collective states objectified; they are society itself seen under one of its aspects" (Durkheim 1912, p. 590; trans. p. 412). Religion, for him, was a mode of comprehending social realities. To put matters again in a stylized way, while for Freud religious realities were psychological realities and for Feuerbach they were anthropological, they were for Durkheim sociological realities. Two points are relevant here: (1) *all* of these accounts are *reductionistic*, and (2), for Durkheim, in reality, his sociological notions about religion were suffused with psychological notions. There is no keeping these matters apart in the way Durkheim wished to and the way his *conception* of sociology required. (Here his practice was better than his belief about

religious practices.) However, it goes the other way as well. Freud's "psychology of religion" and Feuerbach's anthropological account were also sociological accounts. So with all the figures discussed above we have a social-psychological, sometimes socio-economic, account of the origin of religion, the status of religious ideas, and the function of religion. They, of course, differently emphasize this and that, but they have an underlying common conception of religion. What Lukes says of Durkheim was common to all the above naturalistic theoreticians of religion, namely that, refusing to take religious symbols at what orthodox believers would take to be their face value – to see the world through Judeo-Christian spectacles – they sought "to go 'underneath' the symbol to the reality which it represents and which gives it its 'true meaning' and (they sought to show as well) that all religions 'answer, though in different ways, to the given conditions of human existence'" (Lukes 1985, p. 482).

If such a naturalistic account of religious representations is sound, or at least on its way to being sound via some more sophisticated restatement, we can then appropriately turn our attention to the social and psychological functions of religion: the roles it plays in the lives of human beings. These are things that naturalists have characteristically taken to be at the very heart of the matter in thinking about religion. Our attention turns now, that is, not to questions concerning the truth or coherency of religious beliefs, but to an attempt to understand their role in life, *whether the beliefs themselves are coherent or not*.

We have set out a range of naturalistic explanations of religion. It is frequently argued, or sometimes just rather uncritically believed, that naturalistic explanations of religion in effect, and unavoidably, destroy the very subject matter they are designed to explain. Religion, it is frequently claimed, must be believed to be properly understood. Durkheim's own insight that "whoever does not bring to the study of religion a sort of religious sentiment has no right to speak about it" shows, some believe, that neither his own naturalistic analysis nor any other naturalistic account could be adequate (cited by Lukes 1985, p. 515). No matter how we cut it, religious beliefs, on such an account, are in error, and religious beliefs could have no sound claim to be true. His very explanation (like all naturalistic explanations) is incompatible, where accepted, with the person who accepts it continuing to be a religious believer, if he would be at all consistent. Thus, naturalistic explanations, if correct, or even just widely thought to be correct (on the not implausible assumption that people have some minimal concern with consistency) would undermine religion itself – the very phenomena it purports to explain. Who, a philosopher (Gustave Belot) asked Durkheim, putting forth in discussion with Durkheim what Belot took to be a *reductio*, "would continue to pray if he knew he was praying to no one, but merely addressing a collectivity that was not listening?" Where is the person, Belot went on, who would continue to take part in "communion if he believed that it was no more than a mere symbol and that there was nothing real underlying it?" (cited by Lukes 1985, p. 515). Explanation, given Durkheim's way of going about things, becomes identical with naturalistic critique here, and that very fact, the claim goes, reveals its *explanatory* inadequacy.

The naturalist should respond that it is false to say that there is nothing real underlying religious symbols. There is something there very real indeed – facts about human beings and society – only the reality is not what the believer takes it to be. Rather than its being the case that understanding religion requires belief, understanding religion,

in a genuine way, is incompatible with believing it. Moreover, this secular understanding can be a sensitive empathetic understanding attuned (as Durkheim thought it must be) to the realities of religious experience and sentiment. This is shown most forcefully in the accounts of religious experience and sentiment given by Feuerbach, Hägerström, and Ronald Hepburn. Having a feel for religion does not require having the related belief, but it does require having of a sense of what it is that makes religion so compelling, and so psychologically necessary, for so many people, indeed, historically speaking, for most people.

Naturalistic explanations are, of course, incompatible with religious belief. But they are not *thereby* inadequate explanations. They do not explain religion *away* in explaining or presupposing that religious claims could not be true, for the account explains religion's origins, its *claim* to truth, how that very claim is in error, the depth of that error, its persistence, in spite of that, in various institutional contexts and in the personal lives of human beings, its various cultural and historical forms, how and why it changes and develops as it does, and its continuing persistence and appeal in one or another form. An account which does these things well is a good candidate for a viable conception of religion, yielding an adequate range of explanations of the phenomena of religion. It seems to me that the naturalistic explanations we have discussed, particularly when taken together, do just that.

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## Part VII

# Religion and Science

## Historical Perspectives on Religion and Science

JOHN HEDLEY BROOKE

Popular discussion of the relations between scientific theory and religious belief is so bedeviled by prejudice that the subject may benefit from the critical apparatus of historians as well as philosophers. Three general views are commonly found, each elevated into a master-narrative that obscures a complex history (Brooke 1991; Brooke and Cantor 1998).

A conflict thesis, routinely illustrated by clerical resistance to scientific innovation, is particularly pervasive, reinforced by suspicions that religious claims cannot meet the stringent evidential criteria operative in the sciences. References to the trial of Galileo by the Roman Catholic Church and the vilification of Darwin by censorious Protestants add spice to journalistic accounts of opposition, seemingly confirmed by religious allegations that biotechnologists presume to “play God” (Deane-Drummond and Szerszynski 2003; see also Chapter 64, Theism and Evolutionary Biology; and Chapter 66, Theism and Technology).

A second meta-narrative proposes an essential harmony between science and religion when both are properly understood. Advocates point to the strong, if not always orthodox, religious beliefs of many great scientists and to the efforts of willing religious thinkers to achieve accommodation by revising, where necessary, their theologies. A weak form of this harmony thesis simply asserts that it has usually proved possible to achieve conciliation between religious belief and scientific conclusions, as in theologies of nature that have striven to interpret evolutionary processes as modes of creation. A stronger articulation would be that certain religious doctrines, notably the creation of an ordered universe by an intelligent deity, supplied the very presuppositions that made the quest for laws of nature a rational and promising activity (Whitehead 1925, p. 19; Oakley 1961; Hooykaas 1972; Jaki 1973).

A third overview is encapsulated in the NOMA principle of Stephen Jay Gould – that there must be no overlap of the respective *magisteria* of science and religion. In *Rocks of Ages* Gould (1999) followed earlier precedents in driving a wedge between scientific and religious discourse, allocating jurisdiction over matters of fact to science and allowing religious authority a voice on matters of morality. Such partitioning may commend itself as a default position. Because it affirms that the overlap, interpenetration, or integration of scientific and religious beliefs has been detrimental to both, it nevertheless forces historical understanding into a procrustean mold. In particular, it overlooks the



fact that religious beliefs may indeed have no relevance to scientific activity at one level, but be profoundly significant at another. Francis Bacon is often hailed for his secularity because he cautioned against mixing theistic reference with efficient causes when explaining natural phenomena. But, on other levels, Bacon saw scientific inquiry as a religious duty, conducive to the virtue of humility and restorative of a lost knowledge and dominion originally granted by God to Adam (Webster 1975; Harrison 2008).

## Diversity

Such is the richness of the historical record that no single overview is possible. Scientists and religious thinkers have connected, disconnected, and reconnected their scientific and religious ideas on different levels and in multiple ways. The very words “science” and “religion” constitute a problem, changing their meaning over time. In medieval and early modern philosophy, when “science” primarily referred to an organized body of knowledge, theology itself was a science, indeed the “queen of the sciences” for those who considered its subject (the nature and activity of God) the most elevated of all. When the word “scientia” was used to denote *demonstrable* knowledge, there were doubts, voiced by John Locke, as to whether natural philosophy could ever become a science, given that only degrees of probability could be ascribed to its explanatory hypotheses (Locke [1690] (1975), p. 645). The word “scientist” was not coined until the 1830s, and the word “religion” draws its modern connotations from Enlightenment ambitions to impose comparative structures on the study of different societies and their rituals. Those who imagine there can be a normative account of *the* relationship between science and religion must be reminded how easily, but misleadingly, these become singularized, hypostatized terms, concealing a diversity of social practices within the sciences (plural) and among the major world religions (plural). Thus the history of the relationship between Islam and the sciences differs markedly from that of the largely Christian West. In subjects as diverse as astronomy, algebra, alchemy, and optics, Muslim philosophers were once far ahead of their Western counterparts, having both preserved and extended the scientific achievements of the Greeks (Dallal 1999). From the seventeenth century onwards, however, an expanding, *enduring* scientific culture belonged largely to Europe, eventually embracing North America (Gaukroger 2006).

Designating different scientific cultures by their religious affiliation is itself simplistic because it does not follow that a disciplined study of nature was a product of the religious mores of the societies in which it was valued. Where there were connections, as in the study of astronomy, it is the diversity of religious motivation that again requires emphasis. Within Islam, a primary desideratum in connection with prayer was to determine the direction of Mecca from different locations; within Christianity astronomy was vital to calendar reform for determining when Easter fell (Heilbron 1999).

Differentiation *within* each religious tradition is also crucial. For example, many reasons have been adduced for seeing in the Protestant Reformation a catalyst for scientific activity. Particularly relevant were a willingness to challenge centralized Church authority, disrespect for the synthesis of Aristotelian philosophy and Christian theology achieved by Thomas Aquinas, and innovations in biblical exegesis that broke

with traditions of allegorical interpretation (Harrison 1998). The latter had co-existed with a limited approach to nature in which objects were treated as emblems of spiritual truth. A certain parallel developed in the seventeenth century, visible in Isaac Newton, between the exegetical quest for a definitive literal interpretation of biblical texts and the natural philosopher's attempt to definitively uncover the mechanism behind each natural phenomenon (Snobelen 2001, 2005).

The need for differentiation is pressing because, even within Protestant Christianity, some dissenting movements were more conducive to science than others. In late-eighteenth-century England a radical Christian philosophy of "rational dissent," typified by the Unitarianism of Joseph Priestley, placed a particularly high value on scientific progress as both a model and means of social progress (Tapper 1996; Brooke 2005). Moreover, within most religious communities tensions exist between liberal and reactionary attitudes. Because these may surface in contrasting responses to scientific claims, scientific innovations have sometimes been deeply divisive, as with Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859).

Historical sensitivity requires differentiation of the sciences as well as religions. Not every science has had the same set of implications, either positive or negative, for belief in an active deity. For such physical scientists of the seventeenth century as Kepler and Newton, the susceptibility of astronomical phenomena to explanations in the form of mathematical laws cohered with the view expressed by Newton that the beauty of the solar system could *only* have originated in the mind of a divine legislator (Newton 1692). (See Chapter 44, Teleological and Design Arguments.) By contrast, the historical sciences of the nineteenth century (palaeontology, evolutionary biology, and history itself) proved less congruent with philosophies presupposing instantiation in "nature" of archetypal ideas in the mind of God. The word "nature" itself cannot be assumed to be theologically neutral since it is often contrasted by critics of religion with the supernatural in ways designed to exclude the latter (Dennett 2006, p. 25). The issue is complex because Christian philosophers, such as Newton's disciple Samuel Clarke, took the laws of nature to be descriptions of the manner in which God normally (but not of necessity) acts in the world (see Chapter 36, Divine Action; and Chapter 47, Miracles). Despite rejecting Christianity, even Darwin interpreted nature to mean the system of laws "impressed on matter" by a creator (Darwin 1859, p. 488; Brooke 2009).

## Complexity

Unsurprisingly, historians prefer to speak of complexity than to subscribe to master-narratives. Within Judaism one finds almost every conceivable position on the relationship between science and religion: "It is a simple fact that about anything beyond matters of ritual and law, opinions expressed in the Talmud are typically counterbalanced by conflicting opinions" (Efron 2007, pp. 61–4). Crucially there is another reason for complexity. The same religious doctrine, in different contexts, can be conducive or obstructive to scientific initiative. Seventeenth-century Puritan ministers, committed to the doctrine of the Fall, sometimes concluded that scientific inquiry was presumptuous in its rationalism (Morgan 1986). Yet a desire to recover what was recoverable of the pristine knowledge of Adam framed many early discussions of

scientific methodology (Harrison 2008). Whereas some understandings of creation doctrine were reinforced by scientific disclosure of apparent wisdom and design in both the mathematical and organic fabrics of the world, other formulations, as in modern creationist movements, have been directed against foundational scientific theories in cosmology and evolutionary biology. Examples of the ambivalence of doctrines, interpreted differently in different contexts, would also include contrasting interpretations of the Genesis text in which humankind is granted “dominion” over nature. This has been read both as regrettable incentive for human exploitation of nature (White 1967) and, quite differently, as an injunction not to domination but to responsible stewardship (Moltmann 1997, pp. 92–116).

### Respectability

When scientific expertise today commands great respect it is easy to forget that the dream of power over nature was once profoundly disresponsible, even associated with demonic magic (Newman 2004, pp. 43–50). For the emergence of a socially respectable and enduring scientific culture, the requisite resources included those provided by religious values, through which a reformed empirical science gained legitimacy (Gaukroger 2006). Because the invocation of these values played a crucial role in the period between Copernicus’ *De Revolutionibus* (1543) and Newton’s *Principia* (1687), a master-narrative celebrating the dissociation of science from religion in that period is an inappropriate, anachronistic guide (Funkenstein 1986).

Once the edifice of scholastic philosophy began to crumble in European court settings, and subsequently in seventeenth-century scientific societies, a reconstituted natural philosophy benefited from the sanction provided by Christian natural theology. Belief in the unity of a universe governed by a unique set of laws sat comfortably, as it did for Newton, with belief in an intelligent creator whose will had been impressed on the world. Voluntarist theologies of creation also sanctioned empirical methods: if God had been free to make whatever universe God wished, the only way to discover which of the many possible worlds *had* been made was not through arrogant speculation but by humble observation and experiment. As Aristotelian natural philosophy was supplanted by mechanistic images of nature, pre-eminently in the philosophy of René Descartes, the connotations of atheism from which classical atomistic and particulate theories of nature suffered were effectively suppressed by ascribing to a designing deity the organization of matter and the sustenance of its motion. Although Descartes himself eliminated final causes from his mechanical philosophy, they were immediately reintroduced by Robert Boyle, who argued that, while it was presumptuous to claim to know all God’s purposes in nature, from studying the adaptation of structures to their function, some could surely be known (Shanahan 1994; Osler 2001). Was it not obvious that the eye had been designed to see with? Boyle’s image of the universe as finely-tuned clockwork had the attraction of giving scope and autonomy to the natural philosopher in seeking to understand how nature worked, without denying that, as in a handsome clock, each part was meticulously crafted for its purpose. This linkage between science and religion through concepts of design and purpose constituted a genre of natural theology that proved resilient until the time of Darwin and beyond. In an age of reason

it enabled Christian apologists to defend the rationality of their faith and enabled generations of naturalists, many of whom in the Anglophonic world were clergymen, to emphasise the virtue of scientific edification. Epitomized by William Paley's *Natural Theology* (1802), it drew on both the physical and life sciences, celebrating those features of the natural world that, had they been otherwise, would have compromised the very possibility of a viable universe (Brooke and Cantor 1998). For the Cambridge philosopher William Whewell, who first coined the word "scientist," it was not merely that a judicious combination of physical laws implied an intelligent legislator. Whewell saw evidence for the divine origin of the human mind in the knowability of these laws through the mediation of "fundamental ideas" that regulated scientific research (Snyder 2006, p. 92).

### Critiques

The argument for design was one of many employed by Christian thinkers to rebut the attacks of rationalists, clandestine atheists, and materialists. However, inferences to a creator from the natural world were also deployed by critics of Christianity seeking an alternative "natural religion" to one based on revelation. For these critics propositions derived from scripture were not to be countenanced unless they also conformed to reason. The attempt to make "reason" the arbiter was exemplified in books such as John Toland's *Christianity Not Mysteriorious* (1696) and Matthew Tindal's *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (1730). Tindal's claim that science and scripture seldom agreed was based on the one instance provided by Copernican astronomy; but, without doubt, the sophisticated science of Newton allied with the sophisticated philosophy of Locke could be used to privilege reason and experience above other forms of authority (Dybikowski 2004).

This means that during the European Enlightenment the sciences were invoked both to support religious belief and to challenge traditional forms of religious authority. Specific scientific discoveries also proved serviceable for those wishing to promote materialist interpretations of living systems, as in *L'Homme Machine* (1747) of Julien La Mettrie. During the 1740s the powers of matter itself were sensationally expanded by the apparent spontaneous generation of micro-organisms by John Needham, by Albrecht von Haller's disclosure that matter had its own power of movement (muscle tissue removed from the body automatically contracted when pricked), and by Abraham Trembley's dramatic discovery that a chopped-up polyp, the hydra, would regenerate from fragments (Brooke 1991, pp. 171–80). In mid-eighteenth-century France, the controversial encyclopedist of secular knowledge Denis Diderot abandoned deism for atheism, observing that the appearance of design in living systems could be deemed illusory if nature had experimented with every possible combination of anatomical structures, the non-viable combinations having perished.

The best-known critiques of the design argument are, however, those of Immanuel Kant and David Hume (see Chapter 12, Early Modern Philosophical Theology on the Continent; and Chapter 13, Early Modern Philosophical Theology in Great Britain). To modern observers their critiques are powerful, but neither that of Kant nor that of Hume definitively suppressed a physico-theology that continued to integrate scientific

with religious thought and, with more modest pretensions, still does so for some believers today (Polkinghorne 1996, pp. 75–92). Kant himself did not entirely strip the design argument of value since he believed it could assist in analyzing conceptions of God, in clarifying what it would be for God to be God. Historically speaking, Hume's critique was more incisive than decisive, partly because when he ascribed the appearance of design to an immanent principle of order it was difficult to conceive what this might be.

## Darwinism

In exploring the implications of scientific innovation for religious belief it is commonly assumed that, as ever more phenomena were explained in naturalistic terms, references to a deity eventually became superfluous. Certainly those deities introduced only to fill gaps in scientific understanding were vulnerable. The issues are, however, more complicated for at least two reasons. One is that the Christian God had historically been understood not to be a mere god-of-the-gaps but a Being upon whom the entire universe and all the processes within it were dependent – a deity that could work *through* natural or “secondary” causes. Consequently, although Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection was to close a gap in the understanding of how new species had originated, Christian thinkers might still try to see in evolutionary processes the work of providence. A second reason is that, just as religious doctrines could generate ambivalence in relation to the sciences, so scientific discoveries and theories were themselves susceptible to different cultural interpretations. This was true of the development of geology and palaeontology in the period from 1780 to the middle of the nineteenth century, in which the foundations for a science of evolutionary biology were laid. Several innovations successively posed a challenge to religious orthodoxies: Buffon's model of a cooling earth in which human history and earth history were no longer co-extensive; the extension of the age of the earth far beyond a conventional biblical chronology; the demonstration by Georges Cuvier that large quadrupeds had become extinct; and the growing realization during the 1830s and 1840s that phenomena formerly ascribed to a universal flood were explicable in other ways. Yet each of these disturbing scientific trends could be accommodated by Christian intellectuals, willing to see in the Genesis creation and flood narratives not binding history or literal science but inspired commentaries on the human condition (Rudwick 1986). Even the nagging problem of extinction was minimized by Oxford geologist William Buckland as he reaffirmed belief in a deity who was creating every creature possible, not all of which could, however, exist concurrently (Rupke 1983, pp. 172–3).

Darwin's theory, too, would prove susceptible to many interpretations, political and religious (Livingstone 2003). Tacitly in his *Origin of Species* (1859) and explicitly in his *Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin made a powerful case for continuity between humans and animals, arguing this was a humbler and more accurate portrayal than one celebrating the absolute uniqueness of the human soul. For Darwin, the connections between species were material, the mechanism of change arising from the existence both of variations and competition for limited resources. Advantageous variations would tend to be preserved as they passed from successful individuals into offspring and



subsequent generations. Because variations could accumulate with time, natural selection became a perfecting but blind mechanism, counterfeiting design (Gillespie 1979; Dawkins 1986). Since the process involved successive divergence from common ancestors, the overarching pattern resembled a branching tree or coral, not the linear progression from lowly life-forms to human beings that might, more easily, have been interpreted as a plan of creation. Randomness in the appearance of variation, the bloodstained trail of nature's trial-and-error processes, and, with reference to humanity, Darwin's naturalistic account of the moral sense soon reinforced materialist philosophies, conspicuously in Germany (Gregory 1977).

The intellectual landscape was not, however, so changed by Darwin that atheism became the only reputable option. Darwin insisted he was never an atheist (F. Darwin 1887, vol. 1, p. 304). His advocate Thomas Henry Huxley opined that Darwin's theory had no more implications for theism than had the first book of Euclid (F. Darwin 1887, vol. 2, p. 202). For Huxley, science and theology were certainly in opposition, but not science and genuine religious feeling. To this day significant constituencies of ultra-conservative Christians derive some of their identity from an oppositional stance; but a sound historical perspective must acknowledge the many mediators, eminent churchmen and scientists among them, who have denied irresolvable conflict (Moore 1979; Roberts 1988). From Anglican clergy of Darwin's own day, such as Charles Kingsley and Frederick Temple, to twentieth-century giants of evolutionary biology, such as Ronald Fisher and Theodor Dobzhansky, there have been those willing to see in evolution evidence of divine activity (Rupke 2007, pp. 79–138) – not the activity of a supernaturally intervening magician, but the participation in creation of a self-limiting (or in process philosophy a limited) deity, whose control of events is not so absolute as to override the less attractive features of the biological world (Haught 2003). For Darwin's earliest protagonist in North America, the Presbyterian botanist Asa Gray, the theory was welcomed as a contribution to the discussion of theodicy, in that without a painful struggle for existence there would have been no motor to drive the evolutionary process (Gray 1963, pp. 310–11). Darwinism was also attractive to Gray's moral sensibilities because it provided ammunition against polygenetic accounts of human origins that were invoked in the 1860s to justify slavery. For Darwin and his co-evolutionist Alfred Russel Wallace all members of the human species were ultimately one, despite racial divergence (Kenny 2007).

## Conclusion

Historians recognize many twentieth-century developments that prised apart the discourses of science and religion. An increasing degree of scientific specialization meant that questions derived from theological interests were now too blunt to bear directly on scientific research. Natural theologies that had earlier bridged the two discourses were banished in the influential Reformed theology of Karl Barth, for whom knowledge of God could only be achieved through God's self-revelation in Christ (Barbour 1990, pp. 10–16). In the logical positivism of the Viennese school, popularized in the English-speaking world in A. J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936), the demand for verifiability drove a wedge between acceptable scientific statements and religious claims

that were deemed meaningless (see Chapter 54, The Verificationist Challenge). Two World Wars also took their toll in exposing an ungrounded optimism in models of theistic evolution such as that of the French Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (Barbour 1990, pp. 182–5). It is, however, a question whether there is any intrinsic necessity or irreversibility in the secularizing effects of such disintegration (Martin 2007). Developments in the physical sciences, in thermodynamics, quantum mechanics, chaos theory, and cosmology, have encouraged the construction of theologies of nature in which scientific conclusions have once again been prominent (Drees 1996, pp. 92–161). The scientific rejection of a closed deterministic universe, a seductive compatibility between a big bang cosmology and a religious understanding of the creation of time, and the anthropic coincidences that give the appearance of a finely-tuned universe have encouraged religious apologists to look for a revitalized natural theology (Swinburne 1991, pp. 300–22; Polkinghorne 1996; see also Chapter 63, Theism and Physical Cosmology). The classic philosophical objections to the identification of any deity so inferred with the gods of the main religious traditions remain in force; but such initiatives show that the choice between seeing our universe as one among an infinite number, happening by chance to have the requisite parameters for the sustenance of intelligent life, and seeing in its propitiousness the marks of a transcendent power is one in which aesthetic preference may have a significant role (Davies 2006, pp. 194–216).

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## Theism and Physical Cosmology

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG

Physical cosmology is that branch of science which studies the origin, structure, and evolution of the universe as a whole. Comprising cosmogony and eschatology, cosmology is a field which historically has had intimate connections with both philosophy and theology.

### Theism and Physical Cosmogony

Although deeply influenced by Greek cosmology, the early Church Fathers stoutly opposed the Aristotelian doctrine of the eternality of the universe in favor of the biblical doctrine of temporal *creatio ex nihilo* (Genesis 1:1; Proverbs 8:22–31; Isaiah 44:24; John 1:1–3; Hebrews 11:3). Given this unanimity, no council pronounced on the doctrine until the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which declared God to be “Creator of all things, visible and invisible, ... who, by His almighty power, from the beginning of time has created both orders in the same way out of nothing.” By this time there also existed a strong tradition, fueled by Islamic scholasticism, that the finitude of the past could be philosophically demonstrated. Such a beginning of the universe seemed to point ineluctably to its creator (see Chapter 37, Creation and Conservation). Even Thomas Aquinas, though skeptical of arguments for the finitude of the past, admitted, “If the world and motion have a first beginning, some cause must clearly be posited to account for this origin of the world and motion” (*Summa contra Gentiles*, I.13.30).

Seven hundred years later, the discovery of the expansion of the universe, predicted by Alexander Friedman in 1922 on the basis of a cosmological application of Einstein’s general theory of relativity and verified by Edwin Hubble’s observation of galactic red shifts in 1929, coupled with the Hawking-Penrose singularity theorems of 1968, pointed via a time-reversed extrapolation of the expansion to the conclusion that the universe did in fact begin to exist a finite time ago. That cosmic explosion of the universe into existence has come to be known as the “big bang.” The initial cosmological singularity in which the universe originated marked the beginning, not only of all matter and energy in the universe, but of physical space and time themselves. The big bang model thus provided dramatic empirical confirmation of the biblical doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and the missing evidence for a sound cosmological argument (see Chapter 43, Cosmological Arguments).

According to Stephen Hawking, “Almost everyone now believes that the universe, and time itself, had a beginning at the Big Bang” (Hawking and Penrose 1996, p. 20). Some philosophers have denied that the universe began to exist, despite its past finitude. For the initial cosmological singularity is not a point in space-time but, at the very most, a point on the boundary of space-time, so that time, being continuous, has no first instant. This denial, however, is predicated upon the gratuitous assumption that *beginning to exist* entails *having a beginning point*. Intuitively, time begins to exist just in case for any arbitrarily selected, non-zero, finite interval of time, there are only a finite number of isochronous intervals earlier than it. Ironically, these philosophers have failed to learn the lesson of the ancient Greek paradoxes of stopping and starting. For if an object *O* is at rest at time *t* but in motion at some time  $t^* > t$ , then, given the continuity of time, there is no first instant of *O*’s motion, and yet, *pace* Parmenides, *O* did begin to move.

Within physical cosmology there has been no shortage of alternative models aimed at averting the absolute origin of the universe. Indeed, the history of twentieth-century cosmogony has, in one sense, been a series of failed attempts to craft acceptable non-standard models of the expanding universe in an effort to avert the absolute beginning predicted by the standard model. Each of these alternatives – the steady state model, oscillating models, vacuum fluctuation models, chaotic inflationary models, pre-big bang scenarios, ekpyrotic scenarios – confronted daunting theoretical and observational obstacles which precluded their being widely accepted among cosmologists. Wholly apart from the specific problems dogging these models, however, the most significant recent development has been Arvind Borde, Alan Guth, and Alexander Vilenkin’s proof in 2003 of a theorem of remarkable power which at a single stroke swept away almost all attempts to avoid an absolute beginning of the universe. They were able to prove that any universe which has on average over its past history been in a state of cosmic expansion cannot be geodesically complete in the past but must have a space-time boundary.

One of the few non-singular cosmological models to survive the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem is the Hartle-Hawking “no boundary” proposal, which postulates a finite but boundless past. By introducing imaginary numbers (multiples of  $\sqrt{-1}$ ) for the time variable in the equation describing the wave function of the universe, James Hartle and Stephen Hawking crafted a model in which time becomes “imaginary” prior to  $10^{-43}$  seconds after the big bang, so that the singularity is “smoothed out.” Space-time in this early region is geometrically the four-dimensional analog of the two-dimensional surface of a sphere. Any point on a sphere which one chooses to be a “beginning” point, such as the North Pole, is really just like every other point on the sphere’s surface. In particular, it does not constitute an edge or boundary to that surface. Thus, on the Hartle-Hawking model, the past is finite, but boundless. By positing the finitude of the past, the model seems to support the fact that the universe began to exist. In his popular writings, however, Hawking claims that since imaginary time is not distinguishable from space, it would be improper to regard any point on this sphere-like surface as actually *earlier* than any other point on that surface. Hawking asserts that if the universe is as he describes it, then the universe has neither beginning nor end and, hence, no need of a creator.

It is evident that Hawking faces acute philosophical difficulties in contending that their theory averts the beginning of the universe. His uncritical realism with respect to so-called imaginary time is clearly problematic. First, the use of imaginary numbers for the time variable makes time a spatial dimension, which, construed realistically, is metaphysically suspect. Time is ordered by a unique relation of *earlier/later than* and also, plausibly, by the relations *past/future* with respect to the present. Thus, space and time are essentially distinct. To make time a dimension of space or to claim that space can be converted into time, as Hawking's model does, is therefore just bad metaphysics. Second, Hawking has the burden of explaining what physical reality corresponds to the mathematical notion of "imaginary time." It is not any more evident what an imaginary interval of time is than, say, the imaginary volume of a glass or the imaginary area of a field. Other theorists, like Vilenkin, recognize that the use of imaginary time is a mere "computational convenience" without ontological significance. So by positing a finite (imaginary) time on a closed surface prior to the Planck time rather than an infinite time on an open surface, such models actually support the fact that time and the universe had a beginning. Such theories, if successful, would enable us to model the beginning of the universe without an initial singularity involving infinite density, temperature, pressure, and so on.

If the universe had an absolute beginning, then the metaphysical question presses of how the universe could have come into being out of nothing. But why think that the universe's having a beginning implies that it literally *came into being* and so requires a cause? This question connects to one of the central debates in the philosophy of time, namely, whether temporal becoming is merely a subjective feature of consciousness or an objective feature of reality. On a tenseless view of time, the universe, though finite in the *earlier than* direction, never really came into being but just subsists tenselessly as a four-dimensional whole and so plausibly requires no cause of its beginning. Such a metaphysic of time is, however, a radical one, requiring that we regard all our experiences of tense and temporal becoming, both in our apprehension of the external world and in the inner life of the mind, as illusory, a conclusion not unlike Parmenides' denial of the reality of motion. Moreover, the thesis of the mind-dependence of becoming seems incoherent, in that even our illusion of temporal becoming involves an objective becoming in the contents of consciousness, so that temporal becoming is not eliminated. Much more needs to be said on this head, but the question at least serves to illustrate the intimate connection between cosmology and profound metaphysical issues in the philosophy of space and time.

Vilenkin's theory of quantum creation attempts to explain how the universe could have come into being out of nothing. He invites us to envision a small, closed, spherical universe characterized by a positive energy density vacuum and containing some ordinary matter. If the radius of such a universe is small, classical physics predicts that it will collapse to a point; but quantum physics permits it to "tunnel" into a state of inflationary expansion. If we allow the radius to shrink all the way to zero, there still remains some positive probability of the universe's tunneling to inflation. Vilenkin explanatorily equates the initial state of the universe prior to tunneling with nothingness and so construes his model as giving some positive probability of the universe's quantum tunneling into being out of nothing. This equivalence is, however, clearly

mistaken. The quantum tunneling involved is at every point a function from something to something. For quantum tunneling to be truly from nothing, the function would have to have a single term, the posterior term. Another way of seeing the point is to reflect on the fact that to have no radius (as is the case with nothingness) is not to have a radius whose measure is zero.

The absolute beginning of the universe remains, then, inexplicable in purely naturalistic terms. This gives powerful incentive to explain the origin of the universe as the effect of an ultra-mundane cause such as the theist envisions.

The claim that God created the universe raises a host of important philosophical questions. For example, if a cause must precede its effect in time, then how can God be causally related to the big bang event, since there is no time prior to the initial cosmological singularity? The theist could answer this question by holding that God existed prior to the big bang in a metaphysical time, which is distinct from the physical times posited in cosmological theory. Moreover, why think that causes must precede their effects temporally? The cause of any moment of the universe's existence could be simultaneous with it. On a relational view of time, God may be conceived to exist changelessly and, hence, timelessly *sans* creation, and to enter into time with creation (see Chapter 32, Eternity; and Chapter 38, Immutability and Impassibility).

## Theism and Physical Eschatology

Eschatology, long the exclusive property of theology, has in the last quarter-century emerged as a new branch of cosmology. Just as physical cosmogony looks back in time to retrodict the history of the cosmos based on traces of the past and the laws of nature, so physical eschatology looks forward in time to predict the future of the cosmos based on present conditions and laws of nature.

Physical eschatology paints a very bleak and very different picture of the future than that of Christian eschatology. The most likely scenario based on present scientific evidence is that the universe will continue to expand forever. As it does, the stars eventually burn out and the galaxies grow dark. Around  $10^{15}$  years after the big bang most of the baryonic mass of the universe will consist of degenerate stellar objects like brown dwarfs, white dwarfs, neutron stars, and black holes. Elementary particle physics suggests that around  $10^{37}$  years protons will decay into electrons and positrons, filling space with a rarified gas so thin that the distance between two particles will be about the size of the present galaxy. At around  $10^{100}$  years, the commencement of the so-called Dark Era, black holes themselves may have evaporated. The mass of the universe will be nothing but a cold, thin gas of elementary particles and radiation, growing ever more dilute as it expands into the infinite darkness, a universe in ruins.

A bleak picture, indeed; but as Freeman Dyson has reminded us, the predictions of physical eschatology are subject to the proviso that intelligent agents do not interfere with the envisioned natural processes. If intelligent beings are able significantly to manipulate natural processes, then the actual future of the cosmos could look quite different from the trajectory predicted on the basis of laws and present conditions. Dyson's own attempt to craft a scenario whereby immanent agents might stave off extinction, is, doubtless, desperate and implausible. But why should we restrict our



attention to immanent agents? Theists believe in the existence of an intelligent being who is the creator of the space-time universe and transcends the laws that govern the physical creation. On the Christian view, God will bring about the end of human history and the present cosmos at such time as he deems fit (1 Corinthians 15.51–52; 1 Thessalonians 4.15–17; Revelation 21.1).

From a Christian perspective the findings of physical eschatology are thus at best *projections* of the future course of events rather than actual descriptions. They tell us with approximate accuracy what would take place were no intelligent agents to intervene. Thus, the findings of physical eschatology are not incompatible with Christian eschatology, since those findings involve implicit *ceteris paribus* conditions with respect to the actions of intelligent agents, including God (see Chapter 47, Miracles).

Of course, physical eschatologists might ask whether there is any reason to take seriously the hypothesis of a transcendent, intelligent agent with requisite power over the course of nature to affect the projected trajectories of physical eschatology. Intriguingly, physical eschatology itself furnishes grounds for taking seriously such a hypothesis. Already in the nineteenth century scientists realized that the application of the second law of thermodynamics to the universe as a whole implied a grim eschatological conclusion: given sufficient time, the universe would eventually come to a state of equilibrium and suffer heat death. But this apparently firm projection raised an even deeper question: if, given sufficient time, the universe will suffer heat death, then why, if it has existed forever, is it not now in a state of heat death? If in a finite amount of time the universe will inevitably come to equilibrium, from which no significant further change is physically possible, then it should already be at equilibrium by now, if it has existed for infinite time.

The advent of relativity theory and its application to cosmology altered the shape of the eschatological scenario predicted on the basis of the second law but did not materially affect the fundamental question. Very recent discoveries provide strong evidence that there is a positive cosmological constant which causes the cosmic expansion to accelerate over time. Paradoxically, since the volume of space increases exponentially, allowing greater room for entropy production, the universe actually grows further and further from an equilibrium state as time proceeds. But the acceleration only hastens the universe's disintegration into increasingly isolated patches no longer causally connected with similarly marooned remnants of the cosmos. As our observable universe ages, it will become increasingly cold, dark, dilute, and dead.

The question then arises as to whether the observed disequilibrium of our causally connected patch might not be explained as the result of inevitable Poincaré recurrences which, no matter how improbable, will repeatedly transpire in a closed box of randomly moving particles, so that the process of cosmogony repeatedly begins anew within our causal patch. In a recent discussion Lin Dyson et al. ask whether the present disequilibrium can be thus plausibly explained; or "must it be due to an external agent which starts the system out in a specific low entropy state?" (2002, p. 4). They recognize that the central weakness of the chance hypothesis is that there are many more probable ways of creating "anthropically acceptable" environments than those that begin in a low entropy condition. The chance hypothesis is therefore unacceptably improbable. If we take seriously the hypothesis of an external agent who started the system out in a specific low entropy state, then the recurrence problems do not even arise, since the

system has happened only once. On such a hypothesis “some unknown agent initially started the inflation high up on its potential, and the rest is history” (2002, p. 2). Dyson et al., by rejecting the hypothesis of an external agent as well as the chance hypothesis, are finally driven to suggest that “perhaps the only reasonable conclusion is that we do not live in a world with a true cosmological constant” (2002, p. 21), a desperate hypothesis which flies in the face of strong evidence that our universe is characterized by a positive cosmological constant.

Thus, physical eschatology itself provides grounds for believing in the existence of just that sort of agent who is capable of altering the projections of physical eschatology.

### The Fine-Tuning of the Universe for Intelligent Life

In recent years the scientific community has been stunned by its discovery of how complex and sensitive a nexus of initial conditions must be given in the big bang in order for the universe to permit the origin and evolution of intelligent life. The physical laws of nature, when given mathematical expression, contain various constants, such as the gravitational constant, whose values are independent of the laws themselves; moreover, there are certain arbitrary quantities which are simply put in as boundary conditions on which the laws operate, for example, the initial low entropy condition of the universe. By “fine-tuning” one means that the actual values assumed by the constants and quantities in question are such that small deviations from those values would render the universe life-prohibiting or, alternatively, that the range of life-permitting values is exquisitely narrow in comparison with the range of assumable values. In the absence of fine-tuning, not even matter or chemistry would exist, not to speak of planets where life might evolve.

Many scientists have felt compelled to conclude that such a delicate balance cannot be simply dismissed as coincidence, but requires some sort of account. Traditionally, such considerations would have been taken as evidence of divine design (see Chapter 44, Teleological and Design Arguments). Loath to admit the God-hypothesis, however, some thinkers have sought a way out by appealing to the so-called anthropic principle. First proposed by Brandon Carter in 1974, the anthropic principle states that any observed properties of the universe which may initially appear astonishingly improbable can only be seen in their true perspective after we have accounted for the fact that certain properties could not be observed by us, were the universe to possess them, because we can observe only properties which are compatible with our own existence.

Anthropic theorists contend that the principle implies that no explanation of the basic features of our universe need be sought. We ought not to be surprised at observing the universe to be as it is, for if it were not as it is, we could not observe it. While this fact does not explain the origin of those features, it shows that no explanation is necessary. Hence, to posit a divine designer is gratuitous.

This reasoning, however, is invalid as it stands. Certainly we should not be surprised that we do not observe features of the universe which are incompatible with our own existence. But it does not follow that we should not be surprised that we *do* observe

features of the universe which *are* compatible with our existence. And even if it did, it does not follow that insouciance regarding an explanation of those features is appropriate, in view of the enormous improbability that the universe should possess such features.

Proponents of the anthropic principle will respond that seeking an explanation is justified only if the basic features of our observable universe are coextensive with the universe-as-a-whole. The anthropic principle is, however, typically conjoined to the hypothesis that our observable universe is but one member of a collection of diverse universes (a world ensemble) that make up a wider universe-as-a-whole. Given the existence of this world ensemble, it is argued that all physically possible universes exist within it and that the anthropic principle reveals why surprise at our being in a universe with basic features essential to life is inappropriate.

Various theories, some of them quite fantastic, have been offered for generating a world ensemble. Probably the only hypothesis that deserves to be taken seriously is the hypothesis of future-eternal inflation. According to generic inflationary theory, very early in its history our universe existed in a false vacuum state with a very high energy density. As the false vacuum expands, it decays into pockets of true vacuum, forming "island universes" in the sea of false vacuum, each characterized by a randomly selected set of physical constants. The island universes, though themselves expanding at enormous rates, cannot keep up with the expansion of the false vacuum and so find themselves increasingly separated with time. New pockets of true vacuum will continue to form in the gaps between the island universes and become themselves isolated worlds. The false vacuum will go on expanding forever, generating new island universes as it does. Our observable universe is but one island in this multiverse.

We are invited to think of the decay of false vacuum to true vacuum going on at any island's expanding boundaries as multiple big bangs. From the global perspective of the inflating multiverse, these big bangs occur successively. Now comes the crucial maneuver. When we consider the internal, cosmic time of each island universe, each observable region can be traced back to an initial big bang event. Since the multiple big bangs have a space-like separation (they cannot be connected by a light signal), we can consider these various big bang events as occurring simultaneously. As a result, the infinite, temporal series of successive big bangs is converted into an infinite spatial array of simultaneous big bangs. Hence, from the internal point of view an infinite world ensemble of universes presently exists.

Again we see how crucially cosmological hypotheses connect with philosophical debates concerning the nature of time. For if temporal becoming is an objective feature of reality, then the future is potentially infinite only, and future big bangs do not in any sense exist. If there is a global tide of becoming, then there is no actually infinite collection of universes after all. Viewed globally, these big bangs are in the future and will be infinite in number only in the sense that the process of island formation will go on forever. There actually exist only as many universes as can have formed in the false vacuum since the multiverse's inception at its boundary in the finite past. Thus, given the incomprehensible improbability of the physical constants' all falling randomly into the life-permitting range, it may well be highly improbable that a life-permitting island universe should have decayed this soon out of the false vacuum. In that case the sting of fine-tuning has not been relieved.

Moreover, the multiverse hypothesis faces a potentially lethal objection, usually called the measurement problem, which we encountered in our discussion of physical eschatology. Simply stated, if our universe is but one member of an infinite collection of randomly varying universes, then it is overwhelmingly more probable that we should be observing a much different universe than that which we in fact observe. For example, if our universe were but one member of a multiverse of randomly ordered worlds, then it is vastly more probable that we should be observing a much smaller, ordered universe. Roger Penrose has calculated that the odds of our universe's low entropy condition's obtaining by chance alone are on the order of  $1:10^{10^{123}}$ , an inconceivable number. The odds of our solar system's being formed instantly by random collisions of particles is, according to Penrose, about  $1:10^{10^{60}}$ , a vast number, but inconceivably smaller than  $10^{10^{123}}$ . Tiny, observable, ordered universes are much more plentiful in the ensemble of worlds than universes like ours, and therefore we ought to be observing such a world if the universe were but a random member of a multiverse of worlds. By contrast, it is not improbable on the actual laws of nature that our observations should be as they are if there is no multiverse – indeed, the universe must be as old as it is, and hence, as large as it is for the stars to synthesize the heavy elements composing our bodies. The fact that we do not observe a tiny, ordered universe therefore strongly disconfirms the multiverse hypothesis. On naturalism, at least, it is therefore highly probable that there is no multiverse.

The point is that the anthropic principle is impotent unless it is conjoined with a profoundly metaphysical vision of reality. Moreover, the measurement problem remains an unsolved dilemma for naturalistic world ensemble hypotheses, which might make theism the preferable alternative.

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## Theism and Evolutionary Biology

WILLIAM HASKER

This entry will discuss the relationship between biological evolution and the traditional theistic conception of God; in particular, the doctrine of God as the creator of the natural world (see Chapter 37, Creation and Conservation). We will not consider the numerous ideologies which have been erected on the basis of evolution, such as social Darwinism a century ago or the contemporary claim of sociobiology to explain nearly all human behavior in terms of patterns inherited from pre-human ancestors. Such ideologies are nearly always inimical to theistic religion, and they are at best weakly supported by the scientific theory of evolution. So we turn our attention to the relation between the scientific theory and theistic belief.

### Theism and Evolutionary Theory

Evidently there is no inherent difficulty in the idea that God might create the universe and its contents through gradual evolutionary processes. Indeed, if theism is true, well-confirmed theories of geology, astronomy, and cosmology seem to show that God has done just that. The most vocal opposition to biological evolution comes from fundamentalist “creation science,” and is based on a literal interpretation of the scriptural creation story. Its proponents reject not only evolution but mainstream geology and astronomy as well in order to secure the “young earth” (roughly 6,000 to 10,000 years of age) their theory demands. A more sophisticated challenge to mainstream evolutionary thought is posed by the “intelligent design” (ID) movement. ID proponents accept the geological timescale and the gradual appearance of more complex forms of life. They are not opposed to evolution as such, although most (not all) of them insist on the special divine creation of humankind as well as of major biological taxa. Their major scientific effort, however, is directed at showing difficulties for the accepted Darwinian account of evolution. Molecular biologist Michael Behe emphasizes the “irreducible complexity” of many biological structures within the living cell (Behe 1996). (The cell is “Darwin’s black box,” so called because its internal processes were to him inscrutable.) A structure is irreducibly complex if it is a functional system comprising a number of parts, each of which is essential if the system is to be even minimally functional. (Favorite examples include the blood clotting cascade and the hair-like cilia



used by some cells to propel themselves about.) This poses a challenge to evolutionary theory for the following reason: the several components of the system apparently require distinct mutations or other genetic changes in order to be established in the genotype. The simultaneous accidental occurrence of a number of such mutations is enormously improbable. But their occurrence in sequence over a long period of time will not suffice, because the individual changes are non-functional in the absence of the completed system and would not be preserved by evolutionary selection. The conclusion drawn is that the origin of such irreducibly complex structures requires the intervention of an "intelligent designer"; the designer is believed to be the theistic God though the argument admittedly does not establish this much.

A comparatively recent development in evolutionary science that deserves mention here is evolutionary developmental biology, commonly known as "evo devo." Evo devo consists of a number of important developments relating molecular genetics to embryonic development. These developments are too complex to summarize here, but they challenge the ID argument at several points. First, the intermediate stages in the development of complex structures need not have been functionless. Rather, most such structures developed from precursor structures that originally served other purposes; intermediate stages can serve multiple functions before the final, fully specialized function develops. (A crayfish has some 14 different kinds of appendages, all developed from the biramous, or forked, limbs of more primitive arthropods.) Second, most evolutionary change occurs, not through the development of new genes, but through the modification of the molecular "switches" which govern the expression of genes in particular parts of the developing organism. (A striking example: the eye-spots on the wings of butterflies are produced by the same gene that is involved in building the limbs of fruit flies and other arthropods, including butterflies. The gene "acquired a new switch that responded to the specific longitude and latitude coordinates of these spots of cells" [Carroll 2005, p. 209].) This is important because "changing the sequence of switches allows for changes in embryo geography *without disrupting the functional integrity of a tool kit protein*" (Carroll 2005, p. 163f.; emphasis in original). Since changes in switching have only localized effects and permit the gene to function as before in most parts of the organism, the commonly heard objection that most genetic mutations are harmful rather than adaptive is less applicable to this sort of genetic change. Furthermore, it is claimed that evo devo does better than previously available theories in showing how major evolutionary changes (macroevolution) result from the same processes that give rise to minor changes (microevolution).

It may be reasonable to conclude that it is too early for a final evaluation of either of these movements. ID offers a challenge to Darwinian explanations which arguably has not yet been fully met. (Origin-of-life research, in particular, still faces daunting obstacles.) On the other hand, claims that Darwinian theories are devoid of resources with which to meet the challenges and that these theories have been conclusively refuted by the arguments of ID do not withstand scrutiny. It is noteworthy that ID remains very much a minority stance in the scientific community, even among scientists who are theistic believers and might be expected to be sympathetic to its central claims. Evo devo, on the other hand, is built on solid scientific discoveries that will not be reversed or overturned. But the claim that by far the greater part of evolutionary change results from changes in molecular switching rather than from changes in the

actual genes remains controversial; additional research is needed to determine whether or not *evo devo* can fulfill its early promise. One thing, however, is abundantly clear: *evo devo* should disabuse us of the notion that the explanatory potential of evolutionary biology is limited by the possibilities that have already been explored.

Sometimes it is not appreciated that theism, and theistic religion, have rather little at stake in this discussion. The view that God has intervened from time to time to guide evolution in a desired direction, and the view that everything required for evolution was programmed in from the beginning of the cosmos are roughly on a par theologically. There are reasons that make each of these options attractive, but neither has a decisive advantage over the other. To be sure, inadequacies in a naturalistic account of evolution may cause some discomfort for philosophical naturalism, but there are plenty of other arenas in which naturalism can be engaged. Theists, then, should follow the discussion with interest, but without supposing that their vital concerns depend on the respective fortunes of ID and naturalistic evolution.

### Evolution and Divine Purpose

What is essential for an acceptable religious interpretation of evolution is that the evolutionary process must be seen as the means selected by God for fulfilling God's creative purposes. This does not necessarily mean that God must be seen as having actively intervened in the process, though that is certainly not excluded *a priori* (see Chapter 36, Divine Action; and Chapter 47, Miracles). God is no less the creator of stars and mountains because we have adequate naturalistic explanations of the origins of stars and mountains. However, for evolution to be "the means by which God created," it must be the case both that the results of evolution do in fact coincide with (what may be reasonably taken to be) God's purposes, and that it would have been possible for God to know in advance that this would be the case. The serious challenges to a theistic interpretation of evolution are those which dispute one or the other of these claims. We will consider several such challenges.

### Evolution and the "Objectivity of Nature"

An initial objection to the project of a religious interpretation of evolution lies in the claim that science as such is committed to a view of nature as "objective" or non-teleological. According to Jacques Monod, "The cornerstone of the scientific method is the postulate that nature is objective. In other words, the *systematic* denial that 'true' knowledge can be got at by interpreting phenomena in terms of final causes – that is to say, of 'purpose.'" He goes on to say that this postulate is "consubstantial with science"; to abandon it means "departing from the domain of science itself" (Monod 1971, p. 21). Monod traces this idea (with dubious historical warrant) to the formulation of the principle of inertia by Galileo and René Descartes.

Monod takes his principle to imply not only that final causes are banished from physics – which was indeed the contribution of Galileo and Descartes – but that nothing whatever in nature is properly interpreted in terms of purposes of any kind. But this

“postulate” has never been accepted generally by scientists and is routinely violated today, especially in Monod’s own field of biology; students of animal behavior, for example, constantly interpret such behavior as purpose-driven. (A major purpose of his book is to resolve this “epistemological contradiction.”) If Monod’s principle is accepted in its full generality, the project of theistic interpretation of evolution is doomed from the start, but there is little reason to accept it. (For more on teleology, see Chapter 46, Arguments from Consciousness and Free Will.) We go on to consider several additional objections that have been offered to a theistic interpretation.

### Evolution as Cruel and Wasteful

One objection to a theistic and teleological interpretation of evolution that surfaced early on is that evolution is too cruel and wasteful to be seen as the fulfillment of a divine purpose. Darwin wrote to Asa Gray, “I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the *Ichneumonidae* with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of Caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice” (quoted in McMullin 1985, p. 139). Still earlier we have David Hume’s famous complaint about a “blind nature ... pouring forth from her lap, without discernment or parental care, her maimed and abortive children.” As the latter quotation shows, this objection does not depend essentially on evolution, but is rather an aspect of the general problem of natural evil (see Chapter 58, The Logical Problem of Evil; and Chapter 59, The Evidential Problem of Evil). The objection seems to have been especially salient in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, perhaps as a reaction to the excesses of a natural theology in which, as Holmes Rolston has pointed out, “the idea of a perfect machine was transferred to that of a perfectly designed organism ... [and] the then-current paradigm for design persuaded thinkers to overlook not only anomalies and misfits, mutations and monstrosities, but, more importantly, struggle, gamble, and loss” (Rolston 1987, p. 90).

It should be noted that this objection, if pursued consistently (as it must be if it is to provide a forceful anti-theistic argument), harbors within itself value judgments that are highly suspect; it implies not only the rejection of divine creation but a deep antipathy to nature itself. One may be led to hold that it would be better that there be neither hawks nor hares, than that hawks should live by preying upon hares; and the destruction of the rain forests may come to seem, on the whole, a beneficent act, in that it greatly reduces the number of creatures that will suffer, die, and be preyed upon.

Once irrelevant models are discarded (the prairie is not a garden, the jungle is not a zoological park), this objection seems not to be insurmountable. It may not be necessary to ask why God specifically chose to create *Ichneumonidae* or the HIV virus; presumably parasites and disease organisms, like other organisms, evolve so as to exploit an available ecological niche. More generally, John Hick has well argued that a world of objective difficulties and dangers, with its attendant suffering, is a central means for bringing human beings to moral and spiritual maturity. Similarly, in the broad evolutionary context, “Life is advanced not only by thought and action, but by suffering, not only by logic but by pathos” (Rolston 1987, p. 144). This theme resonates deeply with

the Christian conception of God, who “is not in a simple way the Benevolent Architect, but is rather the Suffering Redeemer” (p. 144).

## Evolution as Random and Contingent

In contemporary discourse the “cruelty” of evolution tends to recede somewhat into the background; what is most often said to defeat a religious interpretation of evolution is its random, unplanned character. Darwinian orthodoxy stresses that the results of evolution, which convey the impression of intelligent design, are in fact the outcome of a random natural process which had no end in view. Evolution is, in Richard Dawkins’ phrase, the “blind watchmaker.” This line of argument has been underscored by an emphasis on the contingency of the evolutionary process and its results. Stephen Jay Gould, in particular, insists that the directions of evolutionary change are in no way inevitable (Gould 1989). The survival of various lineages at times of catastrophic mass extinction (such as marked the ends of the Permian and Cretaceous periods) depends as much on luck as on adaptation understood in conventional terms. If we were able to rewind the tape of life and play it again from the beginning, there is no guarantee whatever that human beings, or any other form of intelligent life, would emerge.

Gould seems to think this change in evolutionary theory is fatal to any attempt to understand evolution in terms of divine purpose. If we were able to see evolution as the majestic unfolding of a preordained pattern (as many nineteenth-century evolutionists understood it), then a theological interpretation might make sense. But if in fact it has a radically contingent character, it is no longer a matter of divinely ordained inevitability but rather of simple good luck that we are here with our opposable thumbs and enlarged brains to talk about it.

This way of thinking is highly contestable. On the one hand, paleontologist Simon Conway Morris contends that Gould has exaggerated the importance of contingency in evolution. Conway Morris does not deny contingency, but lays emphasis on the phenomenon of evolutionary convergence, in which the same or similar results are obtained through diverse pathways. He contends that “contingency in individual history has little bearing on the likelihood of the emergence of a particular biological property” (Conway Morris 1998, p. 139). He argues, with copious detail, that “barring the physically impossible and adaptationally compromised, it appears that as a general rule all evolutionary possibilities in a given [biological] ‘space’ will inevitably be ‘discovered.’” This implies that “what is possible has usually been arrived at multiple times, meaning that the emergence of the various biological properties is effectively inevitable.” In particular, he concludes that this is true of the emergence of intelligence – that “if we had not arrived at sentience [i.e., intelligence] and called ourselves human, then probably sooner rather than later some other group would have done so” (Conway Morris 2003, pp. 119, xiif., 310).

The current state of evolutionary research seems on the whole to support Conway Morris rather than Gould on this question (see Schloss 2007). On the other hand, to the extent that Gould is right about the importance of contingency, it should not be forgotten that biblical religion places tremendous emphasis on God’s working through

a historical process that is contingent, unpredictable, and at times extremely surprising. Why then should God not also work through a contingent, inherently unpredictable process of evolution? In either case it will be necessary to affirm God's active intervention to shape events into the desired pattern, though one need not claim to know much about the details of such intervention. To be sure, affirming any kind of divine "steering" of the process brings one into conflict with the regnant evolutionary orthodoxy. Theists, however, have little reason to defer to the authority of this orthodoxy, which derives in this respect more from philosophical preconceptions than from empirical findings.

## Evolution and Human Nature

It is often thought that evolution poses a problem for a religious understanding of the nature of human beings. The acceptance of evolution seems to push one in the direction of a naturalistic, reductionist view of human nature which contrasts sharply with the religious view of humankind as bearers of the divine image.

Almost certainly, this is a mistake. The difficulty here does not lie in evolutionary science as such, but rather in the naturalistic philosophies which underlie some interpretations of evolution (including interpretations given by prominent scientists). Evolution does force one to recognize affinities between humans and other animals, but the fact that humans are animals comes as no surprise; it was well known, for instance, to Aristotle. Also, the major differences between humans and other animals – developed rationality, the use of language, the development of culture, moral and spiritual awareness – are empirically evident. The interpretation of these differences – for instance, whether ordinary morality, with its belief in an objective difference between right and wrong, is a massive illusion, as J. L. Mackie among others has urged – is a matter for philosophical and religious debate. But to assume that common biological descent forces one to accept a naturalistic account of human beings is a classic instance of the genetic fallacy (see Chapter 65, *Theism and the Scientific Understanding of the Mind*).

## Evolution, Physicalism, and Purpose

Thus far, we have found no clear confirmation for Monod's assertion that true knowledge of nature cannot be found by interpreting it in terms of purposes, including and especially God's purposes. The suffering found in nature may give one pause, but does not in the end defeat a theistic interpretation. Such contingency and unpredictability as may exist in evolution are perfectly compatible with viewing it as an arena of divine activity. And the widespread impression that evolution supports a naturalistic, reductionist account of human nature is seen to be due more to the naturalistic philosophies embraced by some evolutionists than to the scientific theory of evolution.

We have yet to consider what may be the strongest motivation for evolutionists to reject explanation in terms of purpose. This is the commitment to physicalistic explanation, a commitment which is often considered to be normative for science generally and has been strengthened for biology in particular by recent progress in molecular genetics

and biochemistry. Maintaining this commitment allows biology to be integrated into the powerful explanatory paradigms of the physical sciences more completely than would otherwise be possible.

In light of this commitment, the overall structure of evolutionary theory looks something like this: Certain complex assemblages of organic chemicals develop a kind of dynamic stability in their interactions with the environment, together with a capacity for self-replication, which leads us to say they are alive. A variety of random physical forces leads to variations in the self-replicating assemblages, and some of the assemblages are more successful than others in maintaining and replicating themselves. Over time, some of these assemblages become more complex than the earliest forms by many orders of magnitude, and their behaviors and interactions with the surrounding environment also become more complex. Nevertheless, the entire process is governed by, and explicable in terms of, the ordinary laws of physics and chemistry. Put differently, it is never necessary to go outside of the physical configurations and the physical laws in order to predict the future behavior of these assemblages; this is the “causal closure of the physical domain.”

No one would claim that this goal of comprehensive, unified scientific explanation has been realized in practice, but enough has been accomplished to make it more than a pipedream. And if the objective of a “theory of everything” is to be realized, this sort of unification must be held possible. However, there is an epistemological price to pay for these benefits. In the physicalist picture, intentional states are physical states of the organism, primarily of the brain and central nervous system. Some of these physical states are believings, doubtings, fearings, desirings, and the like – that is, they are propositional-attitude states. Now, epistemology in an evolutionary context invariably invokes natural selection as a guarantor of the general reliability of our epistemic faculties. Organisms which, in the presence of a saber-toothed tiger, form the belief that a woolly lamb stands before them and experience a desire to cuddle it, are unlikely to pass on these unfortunate epistemic propensities to offspring. So our belief-dispositions, like our behavioral dispositions, are subject to selection pressures, and their general reliability is thereby guaranteed, at least for beliefs which have some fairly direct connection with survival and reproductive success.

When this evolutionary epistemology is combined with the commitment to physicalistic explanation, a startling fact emerges: belief-states and desire-states as such have *no effect* on behavior and are not subject to selection pressures! The rejoinder to this is that belief-states are in fact identical with brain-states and as such they do indeed influence behavior and are subject to selection pressures. This is true, however, only in a Pickwickian sense. The belief-state *considered as a physical brain-state* does indeed interact causally with other physical states of the organism and the environment. But *the intentional content of the belief-state is irrelevant to its causal interactions*; in a conceivable world in which the identical physical state was attended by no conscious awareness, the organism would still flee from danger, seek food and sex, and complain about the weather (or emit sounds interpretable as complaints about the weather) just as it does in the actual world. The selection pressures ensure that the physical state of the organism will be such as to give rise to appropriate behavior, but they have no tendency whatever to ensure that the intentional content of belief-states corresponds with objective reality. And since, in the physicalistic evolutionary scenario, selection pressures



are the *only* factor tending to guarantee the reliability of our epistemic faculties, it follows from that scenario that we have no reason whatever to trust their reliability. Of course, it might be the case, as a result either of a continual miracle or of some kind of pre-established harmony, that what our brains cause us to believe does after all generally coincide with what is really the case. But we can have no reason to think that this really is so – and if it were so, such otherwise inexplicable epistemic success would in itself be a powerful argument for theism.

Assuming these consequences are unacceptable, the alternative is to admit that the intentional content of mental states really does influence behavior – which is to say, that desires and beliefs as such really are relevant to what people do and say. (This of course is what all of us believe all of the time anyway, except for short stretches when we are in the grip of physicalist dogma.) However, this also comes at a price. It means that the physicalistic dream of a theory of everything based on the principles of physics must be given up; those principles need to be supplemented in some way (just how will be a matter for further discussion) to allow for the role of the mind in guiding behavior. Some human and animal behavior really is teleological (not just “teleonomic”). It means also that we may need to consider seriously the possibility of irreducibly teleological explanation even where consciousness is not directly involved; the unconscious and pre-conscious striving of unminded creatures is similar enough to conscious striving to make this a live option. And, finally, once the door has been opened to seeing individual organisms as genuinely purposive, it becomes once again an open question whether we can see purpose on a broader scale, namely in the purposes of the creator.

We have seen that the most common objections to a religious reading of evolution are of little force, and it has been argued that a strictly physicalistic version of evolution leads to unacceptable paradox and must be modified in such a way as to allow for irreducible teleology in the world of nature. If this is so, then the way is open for the development of a constructive religious interpretation of evolution, one that will not merely remove evolution as a threat to faith, but will exploit its possibilities for the enhancement of a theistic worldview.

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## Theism and the Scientific Understanding of the Mind

ROBERT AUDI

The relation between religion and science has long been a major concern of philosophy of religion, particularly since Darwin. There are many elements in the relation, but the most important may be those connected with the concept of mind. In an unqualified form, the central question here is whether the truth of theism can be squared with a scientific conception of mind, or, to change at least the emphasis of the question, whether there is a scientifically acceptable conception of mind that squares with a plausible theistic concept of a person – human or divine. One difficulty in answering the question is that we cannot presuppose any widely accepted definitions of “theism,” “science,” “mind,” or other pivotal terms. Even the most plausible definitions of these terms remain highly controversial. The best course is to establish, for each pivotal term, a working characterization that enables us to address the most important philosophical issues associated with the problem. This is our first task.

### The Terms of the Problem

To make the issue manageable, and to maintain contact with the mainstream of discussion on our problem, we may consider only monotheism and indeed what might perhaps be called “standard” Western theism, the kind illustrated by Christianity, Judaism, and Islam and centering on God as the omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent creator of the universe. If these four terms are taken to imply, as they commonly are in philosophy of religion, more than what intelligent lay people would ordinarily mean by “all-knowing,” “all-powerful,” “wholly good,” and “creator” – if, e.g., omnipotence entails being able to do anything “logically possible” and “creator” implies producing the universe “from nothing” – then it is arguable that the God of standard Western theism is a philosophical construction and hence the concept of God is not (or not entirely) a religious notion rooted in scripture or everyday religious practice. Even if this “deflationary” view is correct, however, the traditional notion of God as creator of the universe and as having these four attributes is both central in the literature on our problem and one that ordinary theists readily arrive at upon reflecting on what is implicit in their initially simpler conception of God. One need not start with a philosophical conception of the divine attributes to find the path thereto almost irresistible

once reflection begins. By contrast, a brief discussion of theism and the scientific understanding of mind need not presuppose that God has certain other, more “technical” attributes often considered essential, for instance impassibility, necessary existence, simplicity, and timelessness. (For entries on each of the alleged divine attributes mentioned above, see Part 4, The Concept of God.)

It may seem that science is less difficult to characterize than theism, but that is by no means clear. Here it is best to center on just a few of the experimental sciences as paradigms – particularly biology, chemistry, physics, and psychology – and frame the discussion with reference to them. We may also presuppose some widely accepted basic properties of scientific theorizing: (a) it aims at providing an account of the phenomena of experience, psychological as well as physical, and (b) it seeks an account that has explanatory and predictive power and is in some way testable through the use of observation or experiment. There is less agreement on what constitutes a scientific understanding – the kind that is an upshot of successful scientific theorizing. Some would say that we understand phenomena, such as those of human behavior, only if we can predict them from underlying states or processes. There would, however, be disagreement about whether the relevant underlying states or processes are causal. There is even disagreement over whether the basic, unobservable items that, at any given time, are explanatorily fundamental are real or, instead, are to be understood instrumentally, say as posits that facilitate the activities of explanation and prediction crucial for negotiating the world. There is also disagreement over the status of scientific generalizations: do they express necessary connections or simply *de facto* regularities? *Must* metals expand when heated or is this simply a regular pattern that we have confirmed sufficiently to warrant our accepting it?

It is impossible to resolve these disagreements here, but we may be guided by the idea that the degree of harmony between science and theism is most readily probed if we consider rich conceptions of each. Standard Western theism is a rich version of theism, giving God not only far-reaching attributes but, by implication, the associated mental properties of (minimally) knowledge and good will. If there is not an equally standard conception of science, we may certainly say that for many who understand science its theories do provide an account of phenomena which has explanatory and predictive power, represents events as playing causal roles and, commonly, describes them as falling into patterns that admit of explanation in terms of underlying states or processes, such as those involving configurations, movements, and forces among elementary particles. Taking this fairly rich conception of science together with the comparably rich conception of theism enables us to address a number of the persistent problems centering on the relation between scientific and religious conceptions of mind.

## The Scientific Understanding of Mind

Even with a conception of science before us, there remains much to be said about what would constitute a scientific understanding of mind. The first point to be made here is that neither psychologists nor biological scientists interested in mind need countenance any *substance* that can be called “the mind.” Rather, talk of the mind – e.g., of someone’s

having a good mind – is considered a kind of discourse about persons (conceived as biologically embodied) and their mental properties, such as thinking. To be sure, many educated people tend to think of the mind as the brain. This is not, however, a considered view: it comes of oversimplifying the multitude of connections between our brains and our mental properties, and (outside philosophy) it is not often put to the basic test it must pass as a serious identity claim: every property of the brain must be a property of the mind and vice versa. Do we want to assign the mind a weight in grams? Could it be dyed bright red, as the brain could? Can we, as in the case of the brain, remove parts of the mind, hold them in our hands, and discard them, without affecting its mental function? And when the mind is wholly occupied with the relation between religion and science, must the brain be also? Given what we know about what the brain must do to keep us alive, the answers are surely negative.

There may be a few who will dig in their heels and defend the view that the mind is the brain. Rather than continue to discuss this, we would do better to note that what, in a scientifically minded person, motivates the brain-mind identity view is the desire to construe a person as a physical system. *That* desire, however, can be accommodated by simply taking every mental property to be some kind of brain property – a view commonly called the *identity theory*. The identity theory goes well with a materialistic conception of the universe, and that, in turn, seems to go well with a scientific world-view. Physics, for instance, is commonly taken to understand phenomena in terms of matter and motion, especially contacts between concrete material entities. This conception is, however, naive: even Newtonian physics countenanced action at a distance, and the relevant gravitational forces do not require a stream of material particles traversing the entire distance.

As scientists report progressively smaller and less “corpuscular” elementary particles, we may wonder how material the basic entities postulated by current physics *are*. We might also ask what scientists must say about the status of numbers, which are indispensable for their work. The number 3 is not a numeral or even a set of numerals including one in every language with a word for the number 3 (destroying them all would not destroy it, or undermine the truths in which it figures). Granted, a scientific materialist may care only about concrete entities; but even if all of these can be conceived as material, numbers and properties (such as the property of being square) are at best not easily interpreted as such. The point is that while materialist *metaphysicians* want to conceive everything real as material, this aim is not essential to science, which, arguably, presupposes – rather than seeking to explain – the nature and truth of pure mathematics and appears quite uncommitted to restricting its posited entities to those properly conceived as material.

A natural step to take here is to distinguish the material from the physical and to maintain simply that mental properties are physical. Now, however, the contrast between the mental and the canonical basic elements of science is weakened. Suppose, e.g., that physical properties are understood as those having causal and explanatory power with respect to observable events. “Mentalists” – those who believe mental properties like thinking and sensing are real – will respond that, clearly, mental properties have this kind of power. But, one might ask, how can a mental phenomenon like a decision cause a physical phenomenon like my telephoning a friend? With action at a distance, there are two physical phenomena in a causal relation; here, the relation is

cross-categorical. There may be no obviously cogent answer to this question, but it should help to recall that physics itself seems to be appealing to less and less familiar kinds of entities in explaining observable events. It should also be said that, if there is something mysterious here, a mystery is not an impossibility. Indeed, there is, as Hume saw, something mysterious about causation of any kind once we look for more than a mere regularity linking causes to their effects.

Suppose, however, that it should be true that a scientifically minded thinker must opt for the identity theory. Is there good reason to think the theory true? It has been ably and plausibly attacked in the literature and is presently not held by most scientifically minded philosophers who count themselves physicalists. There are many other conceptions of the mental available to such philosophers. Two should be noted here: *philosophical behaviorism*, roughly the view that mental properties are behavioral (and hence physical) properties; and *eliminative materialism*, roughly the view that there are no mental properties, and hence mental terms represent false postulations (this view is usually accompanied by the hypothesis that neuropsychology will ultimately enable us to do without those terms in explaining behavior). Philosophical behaviorism is widely agreed to have been refuted, and eliminative materialism, though currently defended by a small number of theorists, does not provide a positive conception of the mental that can be readily used in pursuing the problem central here. Even if it should be successful in showing that certain apparently mental concepts are empty, its proponents have not provided a plausible general account of the concept of the mental and shown that this broad concept is empty.

A view that may promise to avoid the pitfalls of both behaviorism on one side and the identity theory on the other is *functionalism*, roughly the thesis that mental properties are to be understood in terms of certain input-output relations; e.g., to be in pain is to be in a state of the kind caused by a burn and causing outcries. Mental properties are, as it were, *role-defined* rather than defined in terms of any quality they have or type of material constituting them. On this view, a person has only physical and functional properties, and the latter are defined in terms of relations among the former. Functionalism is defensible, but is widely (though not universally) agreed to leave us at least unsatisfied with respect to understanding qualities of experience, such as the painfulness of pain and the redness of an afterimage. Whereas the identity theory could claim that the experience of (say) being in pain is identical with a brain state, functionalism must maintain that there is nothing it "is like" to be in pain, no intrinsic character of the experience: talk of the experience is talk of mediation between inputs and outputs, and that mediation has no intrinsic character. Thus, if my sensory impressions of red and green were inverted with respect to those of normal people, functionalism would apparently have to say that I am still having the same experience (am in the same perceptual mental state) when I approach a red light because, being taught in the same way as everyone else, I respond to red stimuli as they do regardless of my internally "seeing green."

These and other difficulties with the identity theory and functionalism have led a number of scientifically minded philosophers to maintain a *non-reductive materialism*: mental properties are grounded in (supervene on, in a much-discussed terminology) physical ones, but are not identical with them, hence not reducible to them. This view



allows us to anchor the mental in the physical and biological world without either the difficulties of identifying mental with physical properties or those of trying to account for qualities of experience. However, granting that this view does not have to countenance mental *substances*, such as Cartesian minds, it remains a *property dualism*. It will thus be unsatisfactory to those who take physical properties to be the only kind, as well as those who do not see how mental phenomena as such can have any explanatory power if they are not really physical. If, e.g., my decision to telephone someone merely depends on my brain properties and is identical with none of them, how does my decision produce my physical behavior, as opposed to being, say, a mere shadow of the real productive work done by something in my brain which really has the power to move my fingers over the buttons?

This kind of problem is receiving much discussion, and non-reductive materialism is still in development. What has not been generally noticed that is highly relevant to our problem is that if there should be mental substances, their mental properties might still depend on physical ones in much the way posited by non-reductive materialists: nothing prevents my mind from being integrated with my body so as to respond to neural stimuli, say from my color perception, just as reliably as, for an identity theorist, the brain responds to them by going into "color states." If the non-physical property of having a red sensation or being in pain can depend on a brain property, then in principle it can do this even if it is a property of a Cartesian mind. Descartes famously said (in Meditation 6) that we are not lodged in our bodies merely as the captain of a ship is lodged therein; and if one thinks there are mental-physical causal interactions, one might well suppose that the mental depends on the physical even if it also has causal powers over (other) physical phenomena. Reflection on this sort of possibility may lead to the hypothesis that in the end one must either live with a deep mystery in non-reductive materialism or choose between a version of the identity theory and a version of substance dualism.

Is a substance dualism compatible with a scientific worldview? If such a worldview includes the metaphysical drive for monism and especially for the materialism (or at least physicalism) that is so prominent among philosophers of science, it is not. But if one conceives science as seeking a testable, explanatory account of the phenomena we experience and appealing to causal connections with underlying states or processes as basic, then there is no strict incompatibility. Indeed, one can do psychology and scientifically connect the brain with our mental life, in all the ways psychologists do, without presupposing either that substance dualism is right or that it is wrong. In framing an overall conception of the human person, much depends on the status of the principle of intellectual economy, which counsels us against multiplying kinds of entity beyond necessity; for instance, in explaining phenomena, we should posit no more entities – and especially *kinds* of entities – than needed to explain the phenomena in question. This is a widely accepted principle, especially among the scientifically minded, though there is more agreement that it points to something true and important than on just how to interpret it. But when is it *necessary* to posit a kind of entity? That is simply not obvious. The jury seems to be still out on the question of what philosophy of mind, taken together with all the scientific data, best harmonizes with this principle.

## Theism and the Philosophy of Mind

We may assume (for our purposes here) that standard Western theism centers on a personal God, a God conceived as having a sufficiently rich set of mental properties to count as a person of a special kind. Usually, God is conceived as a spiritual being; commonly, God is also considered a non-physical substance. If, however, one wants to say that in the “typical” view God is a kind of Cartesian mind, this would go too far. Those who speak, religiously and not philosophically, of the divine mind do not conceive it as identical with God but as essential to God. It is not common, however, for believers – apart from special cases like the Incarnation of Jesus – to speak of God as embodied, and we may leave the Incarnation aside in order to avoid presupposing any specific theology. Still, any theist convinced that a person must have a body can make a case for God’s having a body – for instance, the world as a whole. At least three points are important if this view, or any divine embodiment conception, is to be taken seriously: God can move any part of the world at will, as we can move our limbs at will; God has non-inferential knowledge of the position of every part of the world, as we (often) have such knowledge of the position of certain of our limbs; and insofar as God has experiences (which might be taken to be a matter entirely up to God), the entire world might be experienced in the divine mind in something like a perceptual way, producing the appropriate sensations with phenomenal qualities that are as rich as God wishes them to be. To be sure, it is not clear how the states of the divine mind *depend* on anything physical; on one view, they would immediately depend on the physical, as where a divine perception is produced by my moving my head, but *ultimately* depend on God, as (at least the sustaining) creator of everything physical. The view in question also implies that we human beings are part of God. This consequence brings its problems, but most of them, such as the harmony between divine sovereignty and human freedom, are already with us.

Still another possibility is that the notion of a body need not be tied to that of physical matter. As some philosophers imagine resurrection, it takes place not by disembodiment of the mind or soul and the person’s survival therein, but through God’s providing a resurrection body in place of the physical one (note that in 1 Corinthians 15:44, Paul speaks of a “spiritual body” as what is “raised”). Theism as such, however, does not immediately entail the real possibility of personal resurrection; it entails this only on the assumption that such resurrection is logically possible. If one’s philosophy of mind forced one to conclude that it is not, unless some suitable physical embodiment occurred, then one could harbor a hope of resurrection only insofar as one took God to supply an appropriate body. That, however, is apparently logically possible, as are various kinds of embodiment on the part even of God.

So far, our discussion has presupposed a kind of realism: that there are things, such as physical objects, whose existence is mind-independent and material. For idealists, such as Berkeley, this view is a mistake, and current antirealisms also reject such views. One intelligible form of antirealism would be, like Berkeley’s, theistic: the primary reality would then be not only mental but the divine mind. Such a view, with or without the idea that the world is God’s “body,” can make sense of both the relation of God to human persons and the common-sense world known through perception and scientific

investigation. The central problem here is to make good sense of the regularity and familiar features of experience. If the picture is as coherent as it seems, the task is arguably quite within the scope of omnipotence.

### Compatibility, Harmony, and Mutual Support

Several points seem clear from our discussion above: that standard Western theism, taken apart from specific theological commitments which cannot be addressed here, provides considerable latitude in the conception of God, that there is no universally acceptable notion of science which rules out the existence of God, and that most of the leading views in the philosophy of mind are either not materialist at all or non-reductively so. Even reductive materialism is not strictly incompatible with theism: God could have created us as material systems, and God could also have a body some of whose properties would be the physical identicals of divine mental properties. We are speaking, of course, about sheer logical compatibility between theism and various conceptions of mind. As important as compatibility by itself is, one naturally wants to ask whether there can be something more: a harmony between theism and the scientific conception of mind.

Here we might begin with a question so far left in the background. Does a scientific conception of *anything*, mental or physical, require the assumption that all explanations of its existence and career must be natural? It is by no means clear that this is so, in part because it is not clear what counts as a natural explanation. It is certainly not clear that if a mental property, such as my making a decision, is not identical with a physical one, then that property's explaining something, such as my telephoning a friend, is not natural. Suppose, then, that a divine decision explains a physical event. It might be said that this *must* be a non-natural explanation because it is supernatural. That may seem true if God has no body, but even on that assumption there is a danger of going too fast. If it is even possible that we human beings are essentially mental substances, then the way events in our minds cause physical events could be a model for one way in which divine decisions do: cross-categorially. This could be harmonized with the view that we are created in God's image. There remains the disanalogy concerning the different kind of dependence of our mental states on the physical and God's mental states on the physical (or anything else outside God). But it is not clear that a scientific approach to the world – as opposed to certain metaphysical interpretations of such an approach – cannot accommodate that disanalogy. Causation across different metaphysical categories may be mysterious, but causation may be somewhat mysterious in any case. If a scientific worldview is possible without it, that would at least not be a typical case of such a view. To many scientifically minded people, moreover, it would seem explanatorily impoverished.

At least three further responses to our problem should be mentioned if we are to indicate the range of main options. First, a person attracted both to theism and to a scientific worldview and unable to harmonize them could agnosticize: simply hold theism as a hypothesis deserving regular reflection and meriting certain responses in one's daily life. Second, one could treat one's favorite position in the philosophy of mind similarly, being agnostic about that while taking one's theism to be true. Third,

one could opt for *noncognitivism*, roughly the view that religious language is expressive rather than assertive: providing a picture of the world and prescriptions for human life, but not describing how reality in fact is (see Chapter 41, Religious Language; and Chapter 76, Theological Realism and Antirealism). Here the task is to harmonize religious *attitudes* with scientific *beliefs*, rather than to harmonize two sets of beliefs having apparently disparate kinds of content. The former task is less demanding, intellectually at least, than the one we have been exploring.

There is a bolder approach for those who want to be both theists and scientifically minded: to employ the points made here (and others) in working toward not only a harmony between the two sets of commitments but also mutual support between them. From this perspective, scientific discovery is viewed as a *prima facie* indication of God's structuring of the world; divine sovereignty is seen as an assurance that the search for truth will tend to lead to valuable results; the intimate connection between one's physical and one's mental life, and especially our autonomy in directing our conduct, are conceived as possibly reflecting agency in a sense that is applicable to divine sovereignty over the world. For people proceeding in this way, scientific results may lead to revisions in theology, as theology may lead to scientific hypotheses or changes in scientific direction. Different people with different theologies and philosophies of science will proceed in diverse ways; but so far as we can see, the compatibility between the two worldviews is clear, and possibilities for harmonious interactions between them are wide.

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## Theism and Technology

FREDERICK FERRÉ

Theism normally entails that the religious believer's highest value-commitments be centered in God, who is considered (at a minimum) to be an effective, creative agent intimately concerned about and aware of creaturely actions and attitudes. The compatibility of such strongly focused commitments with other, subordinate values has long been in question. Should God be trusted *alone* or *along with* other objects of trust? This issue can be seen first in connection with ancient arts and crafts as a premodern spiritual concern, second in relation to science-based "high" technology as a modern debate, and third with reference to possible future technologies as a postmodern hope.

### Technology and Premodern Concern

The ancient concern is dug deep into the biblical tradition. We find it vividly in the story of the Tower of Babel. There human technological prowess is depicted as a challenge to God. The tower, which was to have its "top in the heavens" (Genesis 11:4), was just a sample of what human beings could do if they should remain united on a technical project. Such prowess was clearly not permissible – so clearly that no reason is thought necessary to be given for its impermissibility.

More generally, the technologies of civilization itself – the word *civil* coming from the Latin for "city" – are deeply suspect in the early stories of scripture. Who, after all, is responsible for the first city? It was the major artifact of the murderous Cain. Thus civilization itself bears the mark of Cain. The theme of the wicked city – Sodom, Nineveh, Babylon – runs as a deep pedal point through the biblical saga. We are situated by these stories just outside the urban technological enterprise, positioned with the viewpoint of a suspicious desert nomad looking askance at the corruption brought about by too much ease and too much fancy know-how.

One might extend this viewpoint still further, arguing that the "knowledge of good and evil" against which Adam and Eve were warned in the Garden of Eden could not have been knowledge of *moral* good and evil, since being able to know that it was "wrong" to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree required prior *moral* comprehension of exactly the same sort. Instead, the forbidden fruit had to be a kind of knowledge that both characterizes God and might be considered wrong to fall into human possession.



This double criterion rules out the notion that *sexual* knowledge was at issue, since such knowledge could hardly lead to becoming “like God” (Genesis 3:5). If not sexual and not moral, then perhaps the essence of the forbidden fruit was *technical* knowledge – how to do “good and evil” things, as God alone properly should know how to do. Original sin on this hypothesis would be technical hubris.

This is, of course, highly speculative (Ferré 1988, pp. 107–8). It is an interesting speculation, however, despite its variance from the received tradition in which moral, not technological, innocence was lost in Eden. It does cohere well with many other biblical themes, and with myths of other cultures, like the Prometheus story in which fire, the symbol of technological capacity, was stolen from heaven at great cost for human benefit. If it is at all correct, it would place biblical theism on an unalterable collision course not only with technological faith but also with technology itself.

### Technology and Modern Debate

Technology has changed its character since the rise of modern science. Far more powerful than the ancient arts and crafts, modern technology has been deliberately designed under the leading conceptualities and values of the modern era: analytical, non-traditional, “value-free,” quantitative, and oriented toward the maximization of power not only for warfare but also for control of nature for “helps to man” (Bacon 1960 [1620], p. 23). Some theist voices have welcomed modernization as compatible with theism; some have denounced it.

One of the welcoming voices was that of Harvey Cox. Though Cox himself has become more cautious, his initial position stands as a reminder that theists may not always feel obliged to remain aloof from the technological world – what Cox calls the “technopolis” – to which they have contributed so much (Cox 1965). In fact, if Cox’s reading of scripture is correct, biblical spirituality was the key factor in freeing the human spirit from domination by local “divinities” and allowing the full technological expression of human intelligence to get under way. In the Hebrew-Christian scriptures it is made perfectly clear that God, the only proper object of worship, is not nature but is the transcendent creator of nature. This liberating realization of the transcendence of the sacred had the effect of “desacralizing” the natural resources needed by technological society. God’s clarion call to humanity, that we “subdue the earth,” made biblical theism, in contrast to nature-worship or polytheism, the primary spiritual vehicle for the coming of the present technological age.

To Cox’s Protestant position can be added the Roman Catholic views of Norris Clarke. Clarke chooses a different theological starting place. He does not begin with the “disenchantment” of nature but with the story of the creation of Adam and Eve in the “image” of God. If humanity is to live up to its status, reflecting in a lesser way the character of God, then the human mission must include God’s aspect not only as contemplator but also as creative worker. As Clarke writes:

God is at once contemplative and active. He has not only thought up the material universe, with all its intricate network of laws, but he has actively brought it into existence and supports and guides its vast pulsating network of forces. God is both a thinker and a

worker, so to speak. So, too, man should imitate God his Father by both thinking and working in the world. (Clarke 1972, p. 252)

The subordinate human role is indicated by the fact that we do not, like God, create *ex nihilo* (from nothing). Our materials must be found and simply refashioned. But the analogy between our technological work and God's making and doing remains. Furthermore, Clarke points out, the biblical story of creation includes the human vocation to co-create with God. The first humans – significantly, before the Fall – were given a garden to “till and keep” (Genesis 2:15). The incarnate God-man, too, was depicted as a tool-user: “Thus the labor of the young Jesus as a carpenter in Nazareth already lends, in principle, a divine sanction to the whole technological activity of man through history” (Clarke 1972, p. 252).

Clarke is conscious of the tendency of humans to abuse technological powers and to exploit them for selfish advantage. Theists cannot be naive. Every aspect of human life and practice is subject to distortion and abuse. But, Clarke argues, such a warning is properly against the misuse of technology, not against the technological enterprise as a whole or in principle.

The other, highly critical, side of the debate is voiced by Jacques Ellul, who founds his wholly different evaluation of technology on a different rendering of some of the same scriptural passages noted by Cox and Clarke. Ellul, a Calvinist, makes much of the radical break that entered history with the Fall. In paradise, before the estrangement that forced us to survive by the sweat of our brows, there was no laboring, no use of tools. It is impossible for us now, with sin-laden minds, to think back across the bottomless chasm of original sin to imagine how Adam and Eve “tilled and kept” the Garden of Eden (see Chapter 72, Sin and Original Sin). But Ellul uses a *reductio ad absurdum* argument to show how wrong it would be to imagine Adam and Eve working with tools in the Garden, as Clarke seems to suppose. “Keeping” or “guarding” Eden (different versions translate this word differently) could not – certainly not in *paradise* – have involved the use of swords or spears or other weapons. That much is ruled out by the total inappropriateness of armaments in God's pre-Fallen, perfect environment. But if “guarding” allows of no weapons, then “tilling” allows of no farm machinery. If one is absurd, so is the other. If paradise is to be even gropingly thought about as a true paradise, Ellul concludes, we must resolutely omit technology from the picture: “No cultivation was necessary, no care to add, no grafting, no labor, no anxiety. Creation spontaneously gave man what he needed, according to the order of God who had said, ‘I give ...’” (Ellul 1984, p. 129).

Technology, then, is *tout court* in the domain of sin. It had no place in paradise and arose only because of the Fall. To think of human efforts as “co-creating” with God, Ellul holds, is blasphemy. God's creative activity before the Fall was not in need of completing or perfecting. We must not, in our pride over our human technological abilities, forget that “creation as God made it, as it left his hands, was *perfect and finished*” (Ellul 1984, p. 125). We put on airs when we tell ourselves that we are “working along with” God. If it had not been for human sin, there would have been no need for technology, because “God's work was accomplished, ... it was complete, ... there was nothing to add” (p. 125). Ellul's theological condemnation of the technological impera-

tive is complete. In his well-known sociological analyses he makes further important distinctions between the tools of the craft traditions and the all-devouring efficiencies of modern "technique" (Ellul 1964). The former are less objectionable, though by no means theologically mandated; the latter are demonic and out of human control. Both as sociologist and as theologian, Ellul provides no comfort and gives no quarter to the defenders of technology.

## Technology and Conceptual Issues

This survey of the debate between theists on the proper stance toward technology and the technological society makes clear how urgently thinking in this area requires continuing clarification. Some of the debate may rest on differing conceptions of what "technology" is. Perhaps a reconciling suggestion may be offered as follows. When we speak of "technologies" in general we must include all the ways in which intelligence implements practical purposes (Ferré 1988, ch. 2). To include less would be to create an insupportable bifurcation between premodern and modern ways of implementing our purposes. Modern automobiles are different, but not absolutely different, from horse-drawn carriages or chariots. On the other hand, it is neither ethnocentric nor myopic to insist on recognizing the vast changes introduced into our practical means by the rise of modern science. A radio bears some, but not much, similarity, for example, to a jungle drum. Therefore the *genus* "technology" should stand for all practical implementations of intelligence; the *differentia* should be the kind of intelligence involved, whether habitual-traditional on the one hand ("craft" technologies), or analytical-scientific ("high" technologies) on the other.

Having a definition that firmly roots the technological phenomenon in human purpose and intelligence helps make it clear that technology is nothing alien to the categories of religion and ethics. Indeed, looked at in this way, coming to terms with technology is part of the age-old task of theistic religion's coming to terms with culture itself. Theisms of various sorts have yet to complete the long process of self-definition vis-à-vis the works of human hands. Theisms of the prophetic tradition, standing outside culture and thundering against its perceived defects, contrast with theisms of the priestly tradition, serving inside culture and seeking to relate the ideals of religion to the realities of social life. Both are part of the fabric of standard forms of theism.

Questioning in a new way, however, and with a new sense of urgency, may elicit fresh insights. First, theists cannot, without grave danger to their own faith, embrace the pagan quasi-religion of "technologism." Its anthropology is uncritical; its soteriology is unidimensional; its cosmology is reductionist. Placing unqualified confidence in the works of human hands is technolatry (Ferré 1993, ch. 11), and is unworthy of theism. Second, theists cannot participate in wholesale gnostic rejection of intelligent methods for dealing with the material order. Such rejection of materiality is tantamount to the rejection of the reality or importance of creation. Gnostic absolute dualisms of good and evil are tantamount to despair over the redeemability of all creation. Somehow the balance between appropriate humility and responsible engagement with creation must be maintained.

In the search for such balance, the argument over technology's ethical norms must take place on two distinct levels: the first is on the question of identifying the good, *what* ought to be sought; the second is on the question of defining the right, *how* the good should be distributed, and among whom. For most of the history of the modern period, since the rise of modern science and its accompanying positivism and utilitarianism, it has been widely accepted that the good can be defined in terms of human happiness, and that the right can be fulfilled by building up the greatest quantity of such happiness for the greatest number. This fits well with the modern intellectual norms of simplification, quantification, and maximization we noted earlier. This is no accident. It is a case in which a *style of knowing* has influenced (through its implicit norms) a society's *style of valuing*.

Unfortunately, both for the adequacy of the ethical norms themselves and for the sustainability of the modern technologies embodying them, the taken-for-granted modern stress on *human* happiness left the rest of nature's good out of account. And the modern stress on maximizing the *quantity* of happiness left out also the qualitative issue of fairness in the distribution of this good, in relation not only to the rest of the non-human world but also to future human generations. The modern attraction to simplicity and analysis in thinking led to our engineering technologies becoming highly efficient in attaining want-values, simply defined, but overlooking larger ramifications and causal connections that have a way of ambushing the unwary.

Unfortunately, our norms of thinking have tended to make us systematically unwary – we have been led into modern knowledge-ideals of constantly narrower specialization; our norms of proper investigation have diminished the status of “tenderness”; our moral norms have emphasized anthropocentric interests at the expense of the rest of the world. There is little wonder, then, in the fact that the triumphs of modern human technological values seem so often to turn to terror. We are in need of a fuller, richer set of ideals which can sustain and restrain the planetary adventure through the next century. What might such postmodern norms be like?

## Technology and Postmodern Ideals

Fresh postmodern “ideals of doing,” i.e., more adequate ethical norms needed for a healthier future, frankly rest on new “ideals of being,” new ecological and theological insights into how things fundamentally are. Ethics and worldview intertwine; the times seem ripe for changes in both. In particular, this seems to be a moment of special opportunity for the organismic theism offered by such thinkers as Alfred North Whitehead (Whitehead 1978) and his contemporary interpreters (Cobb 1992). (See Chapter 17, Process Theology.)

Theism of this sort might make the ancient Hebrew word *shalom* again central. *Shalom* means “health” or “wholeness.” The New Shalom is a vision of health among humans living with tenderness and compassion under the gentle guidance of a nurturing God on a whole earth. It is faith in creativity expressed through living organisms, and faith also in the proven capacity of healthy life to sustain and limit itself, through internal homeostatic controls, even as it extends itself over evolutionary time:

quantitatively, from niche to niche, and qualitatively, in its capacity (through some species more than others) to achieve ever finer intrinsic qualities of experience.

From this new theistic “ideal of being,” important consequences flow for postmodern ideals of doing. First, in the future we should regard and respect intrinsic value wherever it is found. Such value will not be limited to human persons. God cares for all centers of value; correspondingly, we are under obligation to give ethical consideration to good of every sort, not just to human good.

Second, however, we should be careful to give qualitative, not only quantitative, good its due. This means that we must not lapse into indiscriminating egalitarianism in our treatment of competing goods. Organismic good is real and important, even when it appears outside human persons; but God’s aim is for ever-increasing intrinsic fineness of experience. Persons, beyond all other organisms, are capable of immense qualitative achievements in mental creativity and the richness of their intrinsic consciousness. This makes it possible to make not merely self-serving but principled theocentric ethical choices between human persons and other centers of value.

Third, in the future, once we recognize the inherently long-term, continuous temporal character of the divine lure toward increasing finite value, we are obliged to give adequate recognition to ecological requirements and to intergenerational justice. The present generation is actual, of course, and has actual need- and want-values. These values have their own urgency and must not be ignored or roughly sacrificed (as in the brutal Stalinist destruction of real persons in favor of a vaguely defined posterity); but the temporal breadth of the relevant community under the theistic vision of personalistic organism must be drawn more inclusively, to ensure that the need-values of future persons and other future life-forms are included in our technological calculations.

## Technologies for the Future

New ideals and worldviews are important, but they are not enough; they need to be implemented in practices and artifacts if the society we hope for is to be realized.

First, what are the implications of the holistic norms of organismic theism for teaching and learning? One thing should be clear by now: modern norms of knowing, for all the brilliance of scientific achievements, have infected typical modern technologies with profound flaws. In place of excessive admiration of “misplaced concreteness” in simple abstractions, we need appreciation of real complexity; in place of near-exclusive emphasis on quantity, we need rich stress on quality; in place of knowledge by rational analysis and specialization, we need new wisdom, including methods of insight, synthesis, and integration.

There is everything to gain, on this theistic vision, by abandoning the rigid distinctions between “disciplines” and “fields” and the many self-imposed barriers to integrated learning across traditional boundaries. These boundaries exist only within technologies of learning that are modeled on the preference for specializations and rigid separations that arose with modern science in the seventeenth century. But these rigid boundaries are radically challenged by a worldview entailing the intimate

interconnectedness of all things. Ecology, the postmodern science of integrated understanding, should be the model for our new curriculum, not reductionist physics. Even physics, today, is far more like ecology than its various specializations make apparent. Academic departments, creatures of outdated (and now dangerous) epistemological norms, could well disappear. In their place, constantly self-transforming networks of integrative understanding are required for both research and teaching. In that integration, quantitative and qualitative understanding – what we today call the sciences and the humanities – will be fully incorporated. Team projects, especially team teaching, would then become the rule, not the exception. Understanding complexity and connectedness, not analyzing simplicity and “purity,” could become central ideals of knowledge.

The technologies of modern specialization – the ones we live with today – have tended to launch into the environment with cold, Cartesian linear logic; postmodern technologies, embodying organismic theism’s ideals of complex, integrative understanding, instead will relate more fittingly and wisely to the vastly complex web of relationships that all human interventions into the environment involve. Human beings cannot live without disturbing the environment. No species does. But we can, by adopting richer ideals of knowing, appropriate to organismic theism, understand far better what our (necessary) disturbances will mean for other co-dwelling centers of value and for future generations. The technologies that will embody such fuller understanding cannot help being enormously different from the great planet-altering machinery that our simplifying, tenderness-free values have produced to rip and tear the earth in service of our modern want-values. It would be reasonable to hope that they may be redemptive technologies that will shape a new world under an ecologically responsible form of organismic theism.

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## Part VIII

# Religion and Values



# The Ethics of Religious Commitment

SAMANTHA CORTE

Although the epistemic justification of religious belief is a central topic in philosophy of religion, a number of people have argued that some sort of theistic faith or commitment to God is possible without belief in God, that such religious commitments can be chosen, and that we should be working out the criteria by which to evaluate them (in particular, see Schellenberg 2005, p. 200; and Bishop 2007, p. 48). This raises at least two important ethical questions. First, when are such commitments morally permissible? Second, are there cases in which they are morally advisable?

Some argue that there are conditions that an agnostic religious commitment must meet in order to be morally permissible, and at least one author discusses possible moral reasons in favor of such commitments. I look at four of these conditions and two potential moral benefits, though the extent to which these weigh against or in favor of commitment depends heavily on what is supposed to be true of the God to whom one might commit.

## Agnostic Religious Commitment

Accounts of faith without belief in God vary both in the details and in the terminology. Richard Swinburne gives an account of “pragmatist faith” on which one acts as if one believed that God exists and puts one’s trust in God (Swinburne 1981, pp. 115–18). According to Joshua Golding, a religious theist pursues a good relationship with God by following a religious way of life, but need believe only that God’s existence is at least a “live possibility” (Golding 2003, p. 25). J. L. Schellenberg’s account of religious faith (not necessarily theistic) states that trust in some ultimate reality is necessary and sufficient for faith *in* that reality, and such trust can be based on faith *that* the relevant religious propositions are true, which according to Schellenberg is incompatible with belief that those propositions are true (Schellenberg 2005, pp. 123–4, 127–38; see also his review of the various accounts on pp. 141–7). John Bishop argues that a person can choose to have (a certain form of) belief in God even while she also takes the evidence for God’s existence to be ambiguous; alternatively, a person can have a faith-commitment that does not involve belief that God exists (Bishop 2007, ch. 5). Other

accounts put special emphasis on hope as a component of “experimental faith” (Pojman 1986; also Myskens 1979) or on acceptance (Alston 1996).

Since I do not want to focus on the differences among these accounts, but rather on the morality of developing such faith or religious commitment, I will refer to “agnostic religious commitments” in order to emphasize that one makes a commitment to pursue a good relationship with a God whom one is not sure exists. I will assume that making such a commitment involves (at least) the following: one has some beliefs about what God is like and has said or done (if God exists) and one is committed to (roughly) trying to act as one believes God would want.

A person who finds the evidence ambiguous could go wrong either by making a religious commitment to a God who does not exist, *or* by failing to make such a commitment to a God who does exist, so she should consider what she stands to lose, morally, in each case. The conditions on making an agnostic religious commitment that follow are intended to reduce the risk of one’s being morally worse off as a result of making a religious commitment to a God who does not exist. Two potential benefits of religious commitment, fulfilling a moral obligation and receiving help in reforming one’s character, suggest that one could also be morally worse off for *failing* to commit if God *does* exist. The extent to which any particular person runs these risks or can hope to benefit depends on what the evidence, ambiguous though it may be, gives that person reason to believe *about* God.

## Moral Permissibility and Evidence

In general, one is better equipped to make good decisions when one has accurate information, so one should seek to act on the most accurate information reasonably available. In making a commitment to God, one commits to acting on one’s beliefs about God – that is, what God wants of one, what God has said and done, etc. – and so one should seek accurate beliefs about God.

So the first condition is that one not make an agnostic religious commitment if one could, by some reasonable amount of further investigation, hope to settle the question of God’s existence. How much investigation is reasonable? Bishop requires that the truth of the religious claims be “essentially evidentially undecidable,” but he also thinks this is probably the case (p. 147). Swinburne, on the other hand, in discussing our duty to investigate matters of importance, says we must balance our investigative efforts with our other commitments (1981, p. 87; see also Schellenberg 2005, p. 202).

The second condition is that the evidence not be against God’s existence, though there is disagreement over how improbable God’s existence must be to rule out agnostic religious commitment. Bishop does rule out counter-evidential commitment (pp. 135–6), and Schellenberg’s “probable falsehood” condition seems to rule out religious commitment “where there is *powerful* evidence against the truth of a religious claim” (p. 203, my italics). Pojman seems to require only that one still be able to hope for the claim’s truth (but see Pruss 2002 and Himma 2006).

Why is it important in making an agnostic religious commitment that one does not think God’s existence unlikely? If God’s existence is unlikely, there is a high risk that one would be acting on false assumptions, and the results of doing so are likely to be

bad morally as well as in other respects. (Bishop's reasons for ruling counter-evidential ventures impermissible do not appeal to the probability of bad consequences; see pp. 152–8.)

Someone might point out, correctly, that in particular cases, one may be justified in acting on an improbable assumption because the value of the outcome if it turns out to be true is so high (see Chapter 50, Pragmatic Arguments). In deciding whether to commit or to refrain from committing, one should consider the expected moral value of each option. However, the decision to commit (unlike the decision to refrain) is a decision about how one intends to make many future decisions, most of which one can't predict or evaluate ahead of time. This suggests a presumption against committing when the evidence is against God's existence. So although I am discussing the moral risks of making a religious commitment, as well as the possible moral gains, I am thinking mainly of cases in which the evidence does not significantly favor either side.

### Moral Permissibility and Moral Content

The third condition rules out making a religious commitment if the content of the religious claims – the beliefs about what God has said and done (if God exists) – conflict with morality. One should not worship a god who is not morally good, nor should one accept requirements or principles that are immoral. (See Schellenberg's "Unwarranted Evaluation" example, p. 202; and Bishop's moral content requirement, pp. 165–6.)

Not all authors explicitly make such a condition, perhaps because they intend "God" to refer to a morally perfect being, and any set of religious claims that conflicts with morality must therefore be false. So why is this condition needed? Perhaps the worry is that one might accept a set of religious claims that conflicts with one's (clearly fallible) moral intuitions on the grounds that perhaps those claims are right and one's intuitions are wrong. However, we are supposing the evidence for the religious claims is ambiguous, and it seems one should not give up one's own moral standard unless one actually has reason to think it is wrong (in which case, one should revise it accordingly). So one should not make an agnostic religious commitment if the content of the religious claims conflicts with one's moral intuitions.

Bishop, however, specifies that the content of the religious claims "conforms to correct morality," rather than to what that person *takes to be* correct morality (pp. 165–6). While this is an important distinction in assessing others' religious commitments, and makes a difference in the actual permissibility of one's own, it is not a distinction that is useful to the person who must *decide* whether she is morally permitted to make a particular agnostic religious commitment. This point does, however, direct our attention to our known fallibility in moral beliefs, and this suggests a fourth condition on making agnostic religious commitments: doing so must not involve adopting a way of life likely to significantly hinder one's further moral reasoning.

### Moral Permissibility and Revisability

Suppose a person meets the first three conditions in making a religious commitment. It is still possible that a conflict with her moral beliefs could occur *after* she has made



the commitment to pursuing a relationship with God. It could occur as a result of new experiences that would tend to lead her to revise her moral beliefs in ways incompatible with the religious claims, or as a result of discovering unexpected implications of those religious claims she has already committed herself to acting upon. To what extent can a person revise either her beliefs about God or her moral beliefs once she has made a religious commitment? To what extent is she morally required to be prepared to do so?

First, we need to know if the nature of commitment itself is likely to make it difficult to revise these beliefs. According to Bishop, a faith-commitment can be “wholehearted” while still being “non-dogmatic, open in principle to revision” as he says it should be. That is, one recognizes that one’s commitment might be mistaken or in need of revision without “dwelling” on the possibility (p. 168). According to Schellenberg, in making such a commitment, a person gives up questioning religious claims, “thus, as it were, putting the issue of their truth behind her” without thereby coming to believe them (p. 163). Pojman, on the other hand, says that while one with experimental faith is committed to live as if God exists, he “continues to keep his mind open to, and to search for, new evidence” (p. 170). But can a person continue searching for new evidence if he is really committed?

It seems incompatible with commitment that one be actively seeking new evidence, at least if it is done with the intention of re-evaluating fundamental aspects of one’s commitment. In order to commit to a relationship, one cannot be constantly re-evaluating its value or its feasibility. A person’s evaluations are influenced to some extent by passing moods. If one re-evaluates the value of a friendship each time one’s friend gets boring or demanding, one is unlikely to stick with it long enough to discover the rewards of long-term friendship. One can expect to have moments of doubt or restlessness, and in making a commitment, one resolves to get through these moments without acting on the doubt or dissatisfaction. At the same time, it may be that there is no longer a good basis for continuing the friendship, and one *wants* to realize this if it is true. Somehow one must strike a morally responsible balance between the need to be open “in principle” to revision and the need to resist it.

Another potential hindrance to revising one’s beliefs after committing is that *some* sets of beliefs about God may require one to adopt a way of life that interferes with one’s ability to reflect on moral beliefs. Axtell, in an article on William James’ pragmatic defense of religious belief, argues that it is epistemically irresponsible to adopt a particular religious hypothesis if the group one would join uses techniques that “demand an unreasonable sacrifice of the individual’s epistemic critical thinking or autonomy.” Such techniques are known to have “typically bad pragmatic consequences” (Axtell 1999, pp. 85–6), which matters here since sometimes these consequences include the performance of seriously immoral actions.

If a particular religious way of life explicitly requires that one sacrifice critical thinking, it might be ruled out by the third condition on the grounds that one shouldn’t accept an uncertain set of claims and then give up any chance of correcting oneself if they should turn out to be false. However, a person’s way of life can interfere with her ability to revise her beliefs without that interference necessarily being explicit. Her new way of life can require so much effort and mental attention that she is left fatigued,

preoccupied, and without time to think. While such sacrifice might be justified for a good purpose and for a limited period of time, religious commitment is not for a limited period of time and such a sacrifice would only serve a good purpose if the God in question does exist and require it.

## God's Existence and Moral Obligation

One might wonder if it would be safer, morally speaking, not to make any religious commitment at all so long as the evidence remains ambiguous. However, we must look at what one might risk if God does exist and one fails to commit to a relationship with God. One possibility is that one would fail to meet an important moral obligation (Swinburne 1981, p. 81). Another is that one might miss an opportunity to improve one's moral character. I will start with the first.

On some accounts of God, pursuing a relationship with God is believed to be morally obligatory. Some arguments for religious commitment's being morally obligatory (if God exists) are based on the claim that God commands everyone to pursue a good relationship with God. Now, a morally perfect and omniscient God would not issue commands unless he really had that authority: he would not deceive us nor be mistaken about his authority. So before making that claim, there must be reason to think that those who are not yet committed to God have an obligation to obey God.

One way of arguing for an obligation to obey is to argue for a divine command theory of ethics on which God's commanding something is what *makes* it a moral obligation (see Chapter 68, Divine Command Ethics). Other arguments depend on a combination of claims about God and moral principles to reach the conclusion that we have an obligation to obey God. One such argument focuses on God's ownership. For example, Swinburne argues that God created the world *ex nihilo*, and so is its owner. "The owner of property has the right to tell those to whom he has loaned it what they are allowed to do with it" (Swinburne 1993, p. 213; see also Taliaferro 1992). Other such arguments focus on God as benefactor, and the type of response owed for such an immense benefit. The appropriate response might be obedience (Swinburne 1993, pp. 212–13) or might be worship itself (Crowe 2007).

There are also arguments that worship is obligatory as the only appropriate response to God's excellence, though it is not clear that this would be a *moral* obligation (Crowe 2007, pp. 471–3; Bayne and Nagasawa 2007, pp. 477–8).

Further, if there is an obligation to commit to God, if God exists, then it may also matter how serious it is to fail in that obligation. For example, Pruss considers the implications of a principle that the degree of demerit depends on the value of the being one has wronged (Pruss 2002, pp. 298–9). It is hard to know, though, how to assess the importance of an obligation that would in many respects be unique.

There is not room to discuss whether any of these arguments succeed. However, it is important to notice that the strength of the arguments depends both on what there is reason to believe about God (e.g., that God is our creator or benefactor), as well as on the truth of particular moral principles (e.g., principles about ownership rights, debts of gratitude, or how to respond to excellence).

## God's Existence and Moral Aid

Many people believe that God helps his followers become better people. People sometimes pray for help in becoming the sorts of people that act in ways that they already recognize to be right, but in which they have not been successful. "Help me be more compassionate to that co-worker who gets on my nerves" and "Give me the courage to confront this evil rather than turn away," for example. If God provides this help only to those who are committed to God, then if God exists and one fails to commit, one has lost an opportunity to improve one's character.

There is a difficulty here. Why wouldn't a good God help *everyone* become better, rather than only those who are committed to God? One possibility is that God helps only those who explicitly ask for God's help, because it would be wrong to act on a person's character without that person's consent (as it would be wrong to perform surgery on a person without that person's consent). If it is only those who are pursuing a relationship with God that ask for (and consent to) such help, then God will help only them. (A related discussion can be found in Stump 1989, pp. 190–2.) Another possibility is that the help is provided, at least in part, by the requirements of the commitment itself. In that case, God cannot help those who do not at least try to lead the sort of life God requires of God's followers.

Religious commitment can be counted on to lead to better moral character only if God exists and is able to act on people's character. If God does not exist, there is no direct moral improvement of character and no special reason to assume that the actions required by the commitment will have any better effect on one's character than those one would have taken in pursuing a moral, but secular, life.

## Concluding Remarks

I have not discussed all the risks or potential benefits of making an agnostic religious commitment. One condition I omitted, as being of a different sort, is that of morally acceptable motive (see Bishop, pp. 163–4; and Swinburne 1981, pp. 129–41). I also left out the possible psychological effects of religious commitment on a person's level of moral motivation, and the possible moral benefits of acting as part of a religious community, though I did consider some of the risks of the latter.

I also want to point out that if the evidence, instead of being ambiguous, is strongly in favor of God's existence, then the third and fourth conditions become much trickier. If the evidence of a good God is otherwise very strong, how is one to respond to some seemingly immoral religious requirement? There has been much interesting discussion of this, usually put in the context of Abraham and the binding of Isaac (see Wainwright 2005, ch. 10). Also, if the evidence is very strong when one first commits, how much room must one leave for possible future re-evaluation, when it seems likely that re-evaluation would tend to lead one in the wrong direction?

There is also more to be said about the situation in which the evidence of a God seems fairly weak. Is some lesser response than commitment called for? Perhaps one should show an attitude of respect toward a possibly existing God, an attitude that is not based

solely on respect for the feelings of believers. Perhaps also one should express openness to divine assistance should there be any.

From the above discussion, it appears difficult to conclude anything about the moral advisability of agnostic religious commitments in general. Beliefs about God vary too much. If the evidence supports beliefs about God that are very abstract, with little concrete guidance for action, then commitment offers very little moral risk, though it may also give little reason for thinking there is anything moral to be gained by it. A more substantive set of beliefs about God may suggest that commitment is morally urgent, but also involve more risk if the beliefs are false.

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## Divine Command Ethics

JANINE MARIE IDZIAK

Different ethical theories postulate different groundings for rightness and wrongness. A divine command theory holds that rightness and wrongness of action is *dependent on the commands and prohibitions of God*. According to this theory, “an action or kind of action is right or wrong if and only if and *because* it is commanded or forbidden by God” (Frankena 1973, p. 28). In other words, the theory stipulates that “what ultimately *makes* an action right or wrong is its being commanded or forbidden by God and nothing else” (1973, p. 28). According to the divine command theory, it is not the case that God commands a particular action because it is right, or prohibits it because it is wrong; rather, an action is right (or wrong) because God commands (or prohibits) it. An ethics of divine commands is often expressed in terms of right and wrong being determined by the *will of God*.

Divine command ethics (hereafter DCE) has a long history. The idea of such an ethical theory is traced back to Plato’s *Euthyphro*, which raises the question of whether something is holy because the gods approve it or whether they approve it because it is holy. Among early Christian and medieval writers, isolated texts indicative of DCE are found in the writings of Augustine, Ambrose, Gregory the Great, the Pseudo-Cyprian, Isidore of Seville, Hugh of St Victor, and Anselm. DCE became more prominent and more extensively discussed in the late Middle Ages. John Duns Scotus showed proclivities toward it, and William of Ockham clearly espoused it. The theory received its fullest articulation in the work of Andrew of Neufchateau and was subsequently adopted by Peter of Ailly, Jean Gerson, and Gabriel Biel (Idziak 1980, 1989; Andrew of Neufchateau 1997 [1358–9]).

DCE also played a part in Reformation theology. Remarks characteristics of this position are found in the writings of Martin Luther and John Calvin. Among English Puritans, it was espoused by William Perkins and John Preston. Further, DCE was the subject of vigorous debate among British moralists of the modern period. Ralph Cudworth, Thomas Chubb, George Rust, Anthony Earl of Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, Richard Price, and Jeremy Bentham all argued against it. On the other hand, René Descartes was perceived as a divine command ethicist, John Locke showed inclinations toward this ethical theory, and William Paley clearly advocated it (Idziak 1980, 1989).

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, interest in DCE resurfaced among analytic philosophers (Adams 1973; Quinn 1990). As the contemporary discussion continues, some strains of divine command ethical thinking have been recognized in the Islamic religious tradition (Kelsay 1990, 1994) and in the Jewish tradition (Harris 2003).

The dependency of rightness and wrongness of action on divine commands has been analyzed and explicated in various ways. In the contemporary literature DCE has been put forward as a theory about the *meaning* of fundamental moral terms (Adams 1973, pp. 318–47; Harris 2003, pp. 15–19). The framework of *necessary and sufficient conditions* has been used to explicate the dependency of rightness and wrongness on divine commands (Harris 2003, pp. 5, 8–10). Theories have been formulated based on *logical relations* such as strict equivalence between requirement, permission, and prohibition and divine commands (Quinn 1978, p. 30). Drawing on the traditional distinction between God's antecedent and consequent wills, the concept of God's *antecedent intentions* has been used to explicate the dependency relationship (Quinn 2000, pp. 55–7). The relation between divine commands and moral duty has also been construed in *causal* terms in order to capture an intuitive picture of God as an agent *bringing about* or *creating* moral obligations and prohibitions by means of his legislative activity (Idziak 1980, pp. 305–25; Wierenga 1989, pp. 216–7; Quinn 2000, pp. 54–5).

Historically, Andrew of Neufchateau formulated a purely *voluntaristic* version of DCE in which the divine will, without the divine intellect, issues the commands constituting the moral law (Andrew of Neufchateau 1997 [1358–9], pp. 35–49; Idziak 1997, pp. xvi–xvii). Such a position leads to a recurrent objection against DCE that it makes morality *arbitrary* (Idziak 1980, pp. 14–15; 1997, pp. xvi, xxxvi; Sullivan 1993; Rooney 1995). As stated by one critic, “it would appear that God is a being that on the basis of whim or fancy approves of some things, disapproves of others” (Haines 1990, p. 23). While this criticism may hold true of Andrew's unqualified voluntarism, it does not apply to all versions of DCE. Peter of Ailly incorporated the *divine simplicity* into the formulation of DCE. Since the divine will which does the commanding is identical with the divine intellect, God's commands are not arbitrary products of will alone (Idziak 1980, pp. 15–16, 60–1; see also Chapter 31, Simplicity). A related response is that divine commands are not arbitrary because God wills in accord with other divine attributes, such as knowledge, justice, and love (Idziak 1980, pp. 250–1). This approach has been turned into a *modified* DCE in which ethical wrongness is explicated in terms of what is contrary to the commands of a *loving* God (Adams 1973, pp. 320–4).

The defense of any ethical theory operates on two levels: the refutation of objections brought against the theory, and the presentation of reasons in support of the position and for preferring it to other ethical systems. We will begin by considering putatively *good positive reasons* for adopting DCE. On the one hand, it can be argued that DCE is grounded in the experience of the religious faith community. On the other hand, specifically philosophical and theological arguments have been developed to support the theory.

First, DCE captures important religious intuitions, “such as that of God's absolute sovereignty and freedom, or that of the human duty to surrender to God and obey Him unconditionally.” Thus “if God is completely free, if He is the only sovereign, He cannot be subject to any external law purporting to limit His actions.” Concomitantly, “when human beings stake a claim to the independent validity of moral law, they deny



God's supremacy as the only King and the only worthy object of devotion" (Sagi and Statman 1995, pp. 40–1; see also Quinn 2000, pp. 63–4; 2006, pp. 67–8; Adams 1973, pp. 334–5).

It has also been claimed that DCE is *biblically based* (see Brunner and Henry in Idziak 1980, pp. 133–53). On one level, there are particular incidents recorded in the Hebrew Bible in which an apparently immoral act was made the right thing to do by a divine command, thereby indicating that God is the source of moral obligation (Quinn 1990, p. 355; 2000, pp. 61–2; 2006, p. 67). In the Christian tradition, cases cited include Abraham's intended sacrifice of Isaac, an instance of murder; the Israelites plundering the Egyptians on their way out of Egypt, a case of theft; the prophet Hosea taking a wife of fornication; Jacob lying to deceive his father; the patriarchs engaging in polygamy; the Israelites divorcing foreign wives; and Samson committing suicide (see Andrew of Neufchateau 1997, p. 91; Quinn 1990, pp. 354–9; 2000, pp. 60–3; 2006, pp. 66–7). In the Jewish tradition, post-Talmudic Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Levin cites the divinely commanded genocide of the Amalekites in I Samuel 15:2–3 in setting out a divine command position (Harris 2003, pp. 113–5). On a global level, the Hebrew Bible portrays God as a commander legislating about all sorts of things, including clearly moral matters (Quinn 1990, p. 355). Concomitantly, the whole of human duty is summarized in the injunction to "fear God and keep his commandments" (Ecclesiastes 12:13) (Mouw 1990, p. 6). Accounts of the giving of the Decalogue picture God as revealing his will and not merely transmitting information so that "it is natural enough to suppose that the authority of the Decalogue depends upon the fact that it is an expression of the divine will" (Quinn 1990, p. 355). Behavioral prescriptions continue to be connected with divine commands in the New Testament. The ethic of love of neighbor is expressed in the form of a *command* on the part of Jesus as Son of God (Quinn 2000, pp. 57–9). Furthermore, since this obligation does not seem to be derivable from human nature, DCE is supported over a natural law ethics (Quinn 1992, pp. 504–7; Idziak 2004, p. 293; see also Chapter 69, Natural Law Ethics).

In the Islamic tradition, al-Shafi'i (d. 820) gives evidence of espousing DCE in his discussion of *God's abrogation of directives* such as "the Qur'anic case in which the direction of prayer was altered by God's declaration in Sura 2" from facing Jerusalem to facing Mecca (Kelsay 1994, p. 117). As a commentator states: "The conclusion of al-Shafi'i is that each direction 'was valid at its time,' that is, as long as God declared the direction of prayer to be Jerusalem, it was so, but when God's declaration indicated the direction of worship as Mecca 'it became obligatory'" (Kelsay 1994, p. 117).

In the Christian tradition, DCE is further grounded in *spirituality*. Spiritual leaders, writers, and directors have maintained that "human beings are at their best when they are surrendering to the will of God in all things" (Mouw 1990, p. 5). Illustrative of this sense of complete abandonment to God's will is the late medieval classic *The Imitation of Christ*, in which Thomas à Kempis depicts Christ counseling a disciple "to learn perfect self-surrender, and to accept My will without argument or complaint" (1978 [1441], p. 174). In a meditation on the phrase of the Lord's Prayer, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," Teresa of Avila muses:

"Fiat voluntas tua": that is, may the Lord fulfill His will in me, in every way and manner which Thou, my Lord, desirest. If Thou wilt do this by means of trials, give me strength

and let them come. If by means of persecutions and sickness and dishonor and need, here I am, my Father, I do not turn my face away from Thee nor have I the right to turn my back upon them. ... Do Thou grant me the grace of bestowing on me Thy kingdom so that I may do thy will, since He has asked this of me. Dispose of me as of that which is Thine own, in accordance with Thy will. (1964 [1583], p. 215)

Or again, the colonial American saint Elizabeth Ann Seton enjoins that “the first purpose of our daily work is to do the will of God; secondly, to do it in the manner he wills; and thirdly, to do it because it is his will” (Pennington 1988, p. 7).

And it is not the case that a sense of conformity to God’s will characterizes only extraordinary Christians. The same theme is found in liturgical sources used by the Christian community at large. It is found in traditional hymns:

Father, who didst fashion man / Godlike in thy loving plan / Fill us with that love divine  
/ And conform our wills to thine. (*Father, we thank thee who has planted. ...*)

Watch o’er thy Church, O Lord, in mercy / Save it from evil, guard it still / Perfect it in thy  
love, unite it / Cleansed and conformed unto thy will. (*On this day, the first of days. ...*)

Perusal of a worship book such as the Presbyterian *Daily Prayer* provides examples of how the notion of conformity to God’s will figures in Christian prayer: “Eternal God, send your Holy Spirit into our hearts, to direct and rule us according to your will” (Office of Worship 1987, p. 192); “God of love, as you have given your life to us, so may we live according to your holy will revealed in Jesus Christ” (p. 134); “Purify our desires that we may seek your will” (p. 222); “[G]ive us patience to be diligent and to labor according to your will” (p. 224). Thus DCE can be defended *as a formalization of an important theme of Christian spiritual life, namely, conformity to the divine will* (Idziak 1991, pp. 547–8).

In the historical literature are found arguments for DCE which draw from the realm of metaphysics. In the medieval period, an analogy between the metaphysical notion of God as *first being* and the ethical notion of God as *first good* forms the basis of an argument presented by Andrew of Neufchateau to support the conclusion that God is the contingent and free cause of all other goods and the Being on account of which each good is such a good (Andrew of Neufchateau 1997 [1358–9], p. 3). In support of DCE the medieval philosophical theologian Peter of Ailly constructed an ethical analog of the familiar cosmological argument for God’s existence: (1) Among obligatory laws, one law is absolutely first because just as there is not an infinite regress in efficient causes, so there is not an infinite regress in obligatory laws. (2) No created law is absolutely first because just as no created thing is the first efficient cause, so no created law is the first obligatory law. (3) The divine will is the law which is absolutely first because just as it is ascribed to the divine will to be the first efficient cause, so it must be ascribed to the same thing to be the first obligatory law (Idziak 1980, pp. 58–9; 1989, pp. 57–8).

The dependency of morals on divine commands has been discussed in connection with God’s status as *first and uncaused cause* by both medieval and Protestant writers (Idziak 1989, pp. 48–51). The Puritan John Preston, for example, reasons in the following way. God being the *first cause* implies that God is *uncaused*, that is, that God cannot be causally affected by anything. If God were to choose something because he

perceived it to possess goodness or justice, then God would be causally affected by something external to himself, which is impossible. Therefore, it is not the case that God wills something because it is good or just; rather, something is good or just because God wills it (Idziak 1989, pp. 50–1).

In the literature of the British modern period, DCE is connected with the metaphysical issue of the *status of the essences*, morality being treated as one instance of this more general problem (see Chapter 13, Early Modern Philosophical Theology in Great Britain). Ralph Cudworth interprets Descartes as having espoused DCE because the natures and essences of all things depend on the will of God. The reason is that, if such dependency were not the case, it would follow that “something that was not God was independent upon God” (Idziak 1989, p. 54). Richard Price likewise considers whether “we must give up the unalterable natures of right and wrong and make them dependent on the divine will” in order to avoid “setting up something distinct from God, which is independent of him, and equally eternal and necessary” (Idziak 1989, p. 54). The philosophical argument that DCE must be adopted in the realm of ethics because *there cannot be anything which is independent of God* is consistent with the aforementioned religious belief in divine sovereignty.

In both the historical and contemporary literature, DCE has been regarded as a correlate of divine omnipotence (Idziak 1989, pp. 51–3, 60–1; see also Chapter 27, Omnipotence). However, grounding God’s ethical authority in divine power has occasioned harsh criticism of DCE as a “might makes right” doctrine (Idziak 1989, pp. 60–1). Some advocates of DCE, such as Karl Barth, explicitly reject appeal to divine power as a basis for adherence to this theory (Idziak 1980, pp. 126–7). According to Barth, God’s ethical claim on us lies in the fact that God “has given Himself to us,” that “although He could be without us He did not and does not will to be without us,” that “He has taken our place and taken up our cause” (quoted in Idziak 1980, p. 130).

Another objection to DCE which recurs in both the historical and contemporary literature is that the theory has *counterintuitive consequences*. Since divine commands create morality, this means that if God prohibited honesty and promise-keeping, then honesty and promise-keeping would be wrong. Similarly, if God were to command such actions as theft, adultery, rape, cruelty for its own sake, torturing young children, or even the hatred of God himself, then these intuitively abhorrent and immoral acts would become the right actions to perform. A response to this criticism is that the commands God issues are consonant with God’s nature and character as, for example, loving and benevolent, so that the aforementioned types of commands will not in fact occur (Idziak 1980, p. 16; 1997, pp. xxv–xxxii; Adams 1973, pp. 320–4; Barcalow 1994, p. 28; Wierenga 1983, pp. 393–6; Quinn 1978, pp. 28–9, 53–6, 58–61; 2000, pp. 69–71; 2006, pp. 75, 81–3).

Since an ethical theory is intended as an action guide, a plausible ethical theory must yield clear determinations about rightness and wrongness of action. An objection to DCE is that it leads to moral skepticism (Quinn 2000, pp. 66–7). Specifically, “since it is difficult, if not impossible, to know what God’s commands are, if the divine command theory were true it would be difficult, if not impossible, to know what our obligations are” (Wierenga 1984, p. 313). This objection is reinforced by the fact of honest disagreements among theists on such issues as capital punishment, artificial birth control, abortion, and homosexuality (Barcalow 1994, p. 26).

On the one hand, it has been pointed out that the epistemological problem of an ethical theory yielding knowledge of what actions are right and wrong is not unique to DCE. It also holds true of, e.g., act utilitarianism (Wierenga 1984, pp. 313–4; Quinn 2006, p. 70). On the other hand, advocates of DCE have called attention to various ways of knowing divine commands. Some advocates of DCE from the Protestant tradition place heavy emphasis on the Bible as the source of our knowledge of divine commands (Mouw 1990, pp. 8–10). Other divine command ethicists look to official church teachings or to the possibility of personal revelation (e.g., through personal prayer) (Idziak 1980, p. 251). Or again, it has been suggested that “one can *infer* by means of reason alone ... what God would command” because “we can presumably ratiocinate ... what a supremely intelligent, loving, and just being [i.e., God] would will” (quoted in Idziak 1980, p. 251). One might also look to other ethical theories as a means of knowing divine commands; historically, Andrew of Neufchateau cast natural law in this role (Andrew of Neufchateau 1997 [1358–9], pp. xx, 83, 87). In the Islamic tradition, al-Shafi’i developed a prioritized schema for ascertaining the content of divine commands. First, God’s commands are revealed in the Qur’an, and concomitantly, in the *sunna* of the prophet Muhammad. If there is no explicit guidance to be found in these textual sources, “then one must follow the consensus of the community, which ‘can neither agree on anything contrary to the sunna of the Prophet nor on an error.’” Finally, “in the absence of clear texts and also of a clear consensus, one should use analogy as a kind of ‘reasoning from the signs,’ that is, from the texts which God has provided” (Kelsay 1994, p. 119).

In the late twentieth century there was a resurgence of interest in an ethics of virtue. On one level, a problem posed for DCE is that it does not permit a coherent account of the moral attributes of God to be formulated, and in particular, an account of the goodness of God. Specifically, if moral goodness consists in obedience to divine commands, then the claim that God is morally good reduces to the trivial claim that God always obeys self-addressed commands (Quinn 2006, p. 75; see also Adams 1973, p. 337; Wierenga 1989, pp. 221–2). Proponents of DCE have circumvented this problem by maintaining that goodness is attributed to God because of certain qualities of character such as kindness, benevolence, faithfulness, mercy, a forgiving disposition, and love (Adams 1973, pp. 338–41; Wierenga 1989, p. 222; Quinn 2006, p. 83).

On another level, one can ask how DCE impacts accounts of human virtue. Since DCE postulates that obligations to obey God’s moral legislation are the fundamental facts of morality, it will be the case that “the virtue of obedience will be the master moral virtue” for humans “and should occupy center stage in moral theory” (Quinn 1992, p. 510). Given the current emphasis on individual autonomy, obedience is not often regarded as a virtue for adults. In a virtue theory driven by DCE, the task remains for philosophers to develop plausible accounts of obedience as a virtuous trait (Idziak 2007).

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## Natural Law Ethics

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Natural law is the body of moral norms and other practical principles which provide reasons (including moral reasons) for action and restraint.

The most basic precepts of natural law direct people to choose and act for *intelligible* ends and purposes. These precepts, which Thomas Aquinas called “the first principles of practical reason,” refer to the range of “basic” (i.e., non-instrumental or not-merely-instrumental) human goods for the sake of which people can intelligently act. Insofar as a possible action promises to instantiate at least one such good, performing it has an intelligible point.

However, the diversity of goods which provide non-instrumental practical reasons, together with the range of subrational factors which can motivate people to act in ways contrary to the prescriptions of practical reason, make it unavoidable that people will face morally significant free choices. Moral norms, including such very general moral principles as the golden rule of fairness and the Pauline principle that evil may not be done even to achieve good consequences, guide choice in such circumstances (though they do not always narrow the range of fully reasonable, morally good options to one) by providing conclusive reasons to choose certain options and to refrain from choosing others. Moral norms are needed in addition to the most basic practical principles because the latter exclude only those possibilities for choice which lack an intelligible point (and, as such, are the objects of merely emotional as opposed to rational motivation).

Paradigmatically, moral norms guide choices between possibilities, both (or all) of which provide *reasons* for action, one (or some) of which, however, are *defeated* (giving the chooser a conclusive reason to choose the, or an, alternative). Immoral choosing is possible (though, by definition, never justified) because people often have powerful emotional motives to act for goods they cherish or desire despite the fact that any reasons for acting here and now provided by those goods are defeated by moral norms which exclude the contemplated action.

Of course, emotion figures in all human action, and, far from being the enemy of reason, it gives support (albeit not undivided) to reason’s prescriptions. In immoral choosing, however, the proper relation of reason and emotion is reversed: reason allows itself to be harnessed by emotion in the cause of producing rationalizations for choices which are, in truth, practically unreasonable (i.e., immoral).



A theory of natural law is a critical, reflective account of the principles which guide sound practical reasoning and moral judgment. A complete natural law theory will identify, in addition to (1) the basic human goods which provide non-instrumental reasons for acting, (2) the moral norms which follow from the integral directive-ness of the principles which prescribe choosing for these goods. Such a theory will also (3) identify the virtues which sustain morally good individuals and groups in upright choosing; (4) explain and defend the possibility of free choice (see Chapter 56, Foreknowledge and Human Freedom); and (5) meet the criticisms of skeptics who deny the possibility of free choice or doubt that free choice can be guided by moral norms and other practical principles which are objective (as opposed to subjective), natural (as opposed to merely conventional), universal (as opposed to individually or culturally relative), or, in short, *true*. Thus, complete natural law theories include both *practical* (i.e., normative, prescriptive) propositions identifying certain choices, actions, and dispositions as reasonable or unreasonable, good or bad, right or wrong, permitted, forbidden, or required; and *theoretical* (i.e., descriptive) propositions about the truth, objectivity, and epistemological warrant for the practical propositions, and the real possibility of freely choosing in conformity with their prescriptions.

Natural law theories characteristically identify principles relevant not only to personal morality, but also to politics and law (see Chapter 70, Religion, Law, and Politics). Historically, the term “law” in the phrase “natural law” has been the source of some confusion. For example, natural law is sometimes conceived as analogous to legislation, creating the misimpression that moral norms and other practical principles have their prescriptive force as dictates of the will of a superior authority. The truth is that even natural law theorists who affirm (as most, but not all, do) that these norms and principles have their ultimate source (as do all realities) in a transcendent divine creator typically do not endorse “voluntarist” accounts of obligation which depict norms and principles as binding *because* they are commanded by that creator (see Chapter 68, Divine Command Ethics). The better account of obligation presents the prescriptivity of moral and other practical principles as a matter of *rational* bindingness or necessity: to fly in the face of moral prescriptions is to be (practically) *unreasonable*. The term “law” in the phrase “natural law” recalls that moral norms are prescriptions common, in principle, to all members of the human community, namely, the community of the human species.

Another confusion arises from the claim (found in Plato and Cicero as well as Augustine and Aquinas) that an unjust law is not (or seems not to be) a law. A simplistic understanding of this claim has led certain “legal positivist” critics to suppose that natural law theory either (1) treats every law, insofar as it is a law, as necessarily just (thus undermining the serious moral criticism of law), or (2) refuses to treat as “law” social rules which are, their more or less manifest injustice notwithstanding, treated precisely as law by actual citizens as well as by judges and other officials who apply law and act under its authority.

A careful reading of leading theorists of natural law through the ages makes plain, however, their recognition that the injustice of a law, while vitiating its proper moral authority, does not necessarily render it invalid by the legal system’s own criteria of validity. Hence, an actor in the system (or a sociologist or legal scholar whose objective is to give a rich and accurate account of how the system functions) may reasonably

treat even an unjust law as “law” in a perfectly meaningful sense. Indeed, even an unjust law may, depending on the gravity of its injustice and certain other factors, retain some measure of moral bindingness. The *prima facie* moral obligation to obey the law remains intact, for example, where it would be unfair to others for a citizen or official to disobey or disregard the law, its relatively minor injustices notwithstanding. The classical saying *lex iniusta non est lex* (an unjust law is not a law), then, presents no denial of the significance of law’s positivity or the legitimacy and value of the study of positive law as such. (In fact, Aquinas’ attention to the positivity of law and its significance constituted a major advance in legal theory for which modern legal positivists are in his debt.) It is, rather, a reminder of the *conditional* nature of the moral obligatoriness which attaches to positive law.

The term “natural” in “natural law” has been a source not only of confusion but also of division. According to the scholastic tradition of thought about natural law founded by Francisco Suarez (1548–1617), knowledge of the reasonable, the good, and the right is derived from prior knowledge of human nature or what is “natural” for human beings. This tradition reverses the understanding of Aquinas, according to whom something in the moral domain is “natural” for human beings and in accord with human nature precisely insofar as it can be judged to be *reasonable*; and something in this realm of discourse is “unnatural” and morally wrong just insofar as it is *unreasonable*. Contemporary thinkers in the tradition of Aquinas argue that practical knowledge (i.e., knowledge of human goods and moral norms and the reasons they provide) is a *source* of our knowledge of human nature, i.e., the nature of beings whose capacities are fulfilled by actions directed toward the ends of friendship, knowledge, aesthetic achievement and appreciation, personal authenticity and integrity, and like goods.

Not every non-skeptical theory of personal or political morality or law is rightly denominated a “natural law theory.” Theories of natural law must be distinguished, for example, from Kantian theories which neglect, or even deny, the basic human goods to which the first principles of practical reason and basic precepts of natural law direct choice and action, and which, taken together, generate an ideal of *integral* human fulfillment – the fulfillment of all human persons and their communities. According to what is perhaps the most prominent contemporary natural law theory (that defended by Germain Grisez, Joseph Boyle, and John Finnis, among other philosophers, theologians, and legal scholars), the most fundamental and abstract *moral* principle prescribes choosing (and otherwise willing) precisely in harmony with this ideal. All more proximate and specific moral norms, even if identified prior to this principle, constitute specifications of this ideal (and are, in that sense, derived from it).

Natural law theories must also be distinguished from theories of the “intuitionist” sort (with which they are frequently confused). The basic human goods to which action is directed by the first principles of practical reason and basic precepts of natural law, and the moral norms which follow from the integral directiveness of these goods, are *reasons*, not intuitions. They are grasped in intellectual acts by practical understanding in reflection on *data* provided by natural and sensory appetites and emotional responses, and by theoretical knowledge of possibilities provided by learning and experience.

This is not to say, as certain neo-scholastic thinkers say (or suppose Aquinas to have said), that basic *practical* knowledge is deduced, inferred, or in any logically significant sense derived from methodologically antecedent *theoretical* (or “factual”) knowledge of

human nature. As Aquinas taught (following an axiom of Aristotle's method), while the nature of a thing or being is ontologically fundamental, human knowledge of natures (including human nature) is derived. An entity's nature is understood by its potentialities or capacities; these are in turn understood by its activities or performances; and these finally are understood by the *objects* of its acts or performances. Human nature, then, is known by understanding the objects of human acts; these are the basic human goods which, by providing non-instrumental reasons, give human acts their intelligible point.

Finally, natural law theories must be distinguished from utilitarian, consequentialist, proportionalist, and other theories which propose aggregative accounts of justice and moral goodness. Although different schools of thought about natural law differ on the question of how, if at all, it can make sense to speak of a hierarchy of *basic* human goods, virtually all reject emphatically the idea that alternative options for morally significant choice can be commensurated in such a way as to make workable (even in "hard" cases) a principle which directs people to choose that option which promises to conduce to the best net proportion of benefit to harm overall and in the long run. Natural law theorists emphasize the "intransitive" (self-shaping, character-forming) significance of morally significant choices for (or against) human goods which, *qua intrinsic* (and, precisely in that sense, *basic*), are never rightly treated as mere means to other basic goods or to some putative "overall," "comprehensive," or "greater" good.

Grisez and Finnis have criticized proportionalist theories and the like, which currently enjoy a significant measure of support not only from secular thinkers in the tradition of Jeremy Bentham and J. S. Mill but also among moral theologians, for confusing human and divine responsibility in regard to bringing about "optimal" states of affairs. The *ideal* of integral fulfillment, though people are capable of respecting the rational principle enjoining them to choose consistently with a will toward it, cannot be an operational objective or goal of human choosing. If this ideal is to be *realized*, it is up to God to bring about its realization. For humans to choose to destroy, damage, or impede one or some of the goods which constitute the basic aspects of human well-being and fulfillment for the sake of an allegedly "greater good" is (in addition to many other failings) to usurp vainly the divine office. Among the specifications of the principle that one ought always to choose consistently with a will toward integral human fulfillment, are the norms against direct killing and other choices to damage persons in any basic aspect of their well-being, either as one's end or as a chosen means to other ends.

Notwithstanding their rejection of voluntarist accounts of obligation, most natural law theorists hold, with Aquinas, that human beings have the duties they have because they have been created with a particular nature (which, again, in no way suggests that practical knowledge, including knowledge of *natural law*, is derived from prior theoretical knowledge of human nature). As a theological matter, they typically hold that God directs people to their proper ends, not by instinct (as in the case of brute animals), but rather by (practical) *reason*. In this way, human beings are made "in the image of God" (Genesis 1:27) and act, as God acts, *freely*, and as co-creators with him. Christian natural law theorists interpret St Paul's reference to a "law inscribed on the hearts even of the Gentiles" (who do not have the law revealed through Moses) (Romans 2:14–15) as a reference to the natural law which can, in principle, be known by unaided reason. The moral law is "natural," then, insofar as it does not depend on supernatural revela-

tion. Knowledge of the natural moral law is sufficient, according to St Paul, for divine judgment. Thus, Pope John Paul II teaches in the encyclical letter *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) that the way of salvation open even to those who do not have biblical faith is to act in conformity with the moral requirements of the natural law.

What, then, for religious believers is the relationship between natural and divine law? According to Aquinas, human persons, by understanding and doing what is reasonable and right, participate in God's providential direction of the whole of creation according to a plan conceived in wisdom and love. This participation of rational creatures in God's eternal plan, and, thus, in divine providence, is identified by Aquinas as the natural law (see Chapter 39, Providence). Of course, Aquinas, like all Christians, holds that reason has been weakened and distracted by sin (see Chapter 72, Sin and Original Sin), and he in no way denigrates revealed moral teaching which, in his view and the view of the larger tradition of natural law thinking, reinforces and illuminates what can be known of moral truth by reason alone. Neither Aquinas nor the tradition holds that natural law renders divine moral commands superfluous.

Although the Roman Catholic Church has been the principal institutional bearer of the tradition of natural law theory in the modern world, understandings of natural law were developed before Christ by Greek and Roman thinkers, whose influences persist to this day, and even today there are Protestant, Jewish, and unbelieving natural law theorists. The prominence of Catholic teaching about natural law, combined, no doubt, with the claim of the *magisterium* of the Catholic Church to teach its precepts authoritatively, has, however, led to its association in the public's mind with Catholicism. An influential strain of Reformation theology rejects natural law teaching on the ground that it overestimates the reliability of reason in the fallen condition of humanity (and on other grounds). But the teaching is scarcely a "sectarian" or narrowly Catholic one.

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## Religion, Law, and Politics

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Religion is among the most potent political forces in the contemporary world and the claims religious believers make on their institutions raise some of today's most pressing political questions. These include whether government can serve explicitly religious purposes, what sort of autonomy religious organizations should enjoy, when claims by religious minorities are unreasonable, and how institutions should accommodate religious diversity. Addressing such questions is the business of practical politics; it is also the task of political philosophy, the normative study of politics.

Contemporary political philosophy in the English-speaking world is dominated by liberalism, a family of political theories which claim that government should ensure a significant degree of individual autonomy. This requires, liberals argue, that government guarantee citizens various rights, including freedom of speech, press, assembly, and conscience, and the right to vote. A number of philosophers have contested particular points of liberal theory. Some have developed rival accounts of the nature and purposes of government, but none has dislodged liberalism from its dominant position. When asking about theism's implications for contemporary political philosophy, it is therefore appropriate to begin by querying its implications for liberalism.

Political philosophy's development has been largely independent of Judaism, Byzantine Christianity, Islam, and the great religions of Asia. I shall therefore construe theism as equivalent to the organized religions descended from Latin Christianity. Focusing on theism so construed illuminates the characteristic motives, strengths, and weaknesses of a number of philosophical views. It casts light on liberalism's motives because liberalism began as an attempt to accommodate the religious diversity consequent on the Protestant Reformation. It also sheds light on the motivations of the other views I will discuss. These developed in reaction to liberalism and, in some instances, in reaction to liberalism's treatment of religion. It spotlights the strengths and weaknesses of various political theories because political philosophy has traditionally assumed both explanatory and normative tasks. Since Plato, political theorists have exploited philosophically compelling accounts of human nature to explain political phenomena. They have relied upon those accounts to defend moral claims about the goods to be realized in political life and the means by which political authorities ought to pursue them. One measure of a political theory's adequacy is its ability to offer compelling explanations of tenable prescriptions for the place of religion in political life.

## Liberalism

Before the sixteenth century, it was possible to conceive of Europe as a single spiritual community united by religion. No one denied the reality of Europe's political and ethnic divisions. It was nonetheless possible to maintain that human beings had common spiritual ends which were to be promoted by diverse political authorities. The advent of Protestantism introduced religious pluralism to Europe on a large scale. Catholicism and the various forms of Protestantism held out different conceptions of human nature and sin, of liturgy and redemption. Their adherents made claims to worship as their religion dictated and urged that those with whom they differed have their rites suppressed. The ensuing conflicts marked the end of a spiritually unified Christendom and posed new philosophical problems. European political theorists had to ask themselves how governmental institutions could remain stable and function effectively in the face of such pluralism.

Some philosophers in the early modern period defended policies of religious suppression. The dominant liberalism of contemporary political philosophy, however, has its origins in the doctrine of religious toleration (see Chapter 71, Theism and Toleration). John Locke and other champions of toleration argued that religious practice is a legitimate matter of governmental concern only when it is disruptive of public order. Otherwise, Locke argued, religious practice should no more concern the government than should any other private pursuit. Liberal theories descended from the defense of toleration aspire to an even-handed treatment of religious diversity. Government should, their proponents say, neither discourage nor promote various religious and moral views. In the name of individual autonomy, it should guarantee the right to pursue any of them.

Let us say that the scope of a moral doctrine is given by the areas of human life to which its values apply. A moral doctrine is comprehensive in scope if all of human life is covered by its values. Liberalism is itself a moral view. The notion of scope therefore enables us to distinguish, following the American philosopher John Rawls (1921–2002), between *comprehensive* and *political* liberalisms. Comprehensive liberalisms are liberalisms whose normative claims extend to all of human life. According to some comprehensive liberalisms, for example, autonomy is not simply a political value. Its realization is a necessary condition of a well-lived human life; political arrangements which promote it are therefore necessary for human beings to lead the best life of which they are capable. Political liberalisms, by contrast, are moral doctrines of narrow scope: their values and prescriptions apply only to political life and political institutions. They make no claims about the true human good and present a political morality which purports to be compatible with a variety of philosophical and religious claims about private life.

Many religious believers find comprehensive liberalisms less even-handed than their proponents claim. Critics charge that liberals committed to realizing autonomy in all areas of life are equally committed to government attempts to promote it in ways detrimental to religion. Thus many liberals' commitment to autonomy implies limits on parental control of education. Democratic education, they claim, should be geared to producing citizens capable of critical reflection on all the ways of life available to them.



The problem is that some religious believers do not attach high value to critical reflection. Many religious believers conclude that a political theory which purports to treat all religions equally is in fact detrimental to them. Comprehensive liberalisms, framed to accommodate religious and moral diversity, are themselves insufficiently sensitive to it.

Because political liberalism is of more restricted scope, religious citizens in democratic societies might find it more promising. The most sophisticated of the political liberalisms is that propounded by Rawls. It is possible to distinguish at least two lines of religiously-based criticism.

The first concerns the role political liberalism accords private associations, including religious associations. The thought of these associations belongs to what Rawls calls "the background culture," which he contrasts with "the public culture," the culture of the political. Some critics have argued that there is no clear distinction between the two. The background culture, including its religious elements, plays an important role in citizens' formation. It is as participants in the background culture, critics argue, that citizens acquire the qualities of character constitutive of good citizenship. A liberalism which ignores the political role of these associations therefore ignores an important source of its own stability. The problem with this criticism is that Rawls does not ignore the importance of private associations in moral education. He does argue that democratic citizens should learn to reason about political matters without relying on their religious views. This does not imply that religious associations cannot play a crucial role in teaching them to do this.

Rawls' treatment of public political discussion opens the second line of criticism. He argues that such discussion should proceed on the basis of a common political morality; religious views may be introduced into public discussion of what Rawls calls "basic justice and constitutional essentials," provided those who introduce them are ready to defend their conclusions on the basis of that common morality. Some have argued that these restrictions impose too great a limitation on religious language. Citizens with religious convictions, they say, should be able to introduce them in public argument. Moreover, Kent Greenawalt has argued that any political morality uncontentious enough to be common lacks sufficient content to settle important political issues. Citizens, legislators, and judges have no alternative but to rely upon other views, including religious views.

## Religion, Nationalism, and Citizenship

The English political theorist John Gray has argued that what he calls "the new liberalism," while ostensibly addressed to all mature democracies, is in fact thoroughly American in its presuppositions and arguments. The charge that contemporary political philosophy is parochially American is an important one for present purposes. Political liberalism's treatment of religion might seem geared to religion's role in American public life and insensitive to its functions in politics outside the United States. Much contemporary political philosophy might seem insensitive to the ways in which religiously motivated political argument and action result from the combination of religion with the particularities of local, regional, and ethnic culture.



This insensitivity shows itself in the limited explanatory ambitions of contemporary political philosophy. One of the most salient features of politics is the vigor of various forms of religious conservatism. Fundamentalism, the most powerful of these, is too often dismissed as a form of irrationality or wished away by those who hope that the spread of democracy will ameliorate it. Yet the worldwide resurgence of religious fundamentalism and its ability to exacerbate class, ethnic, and national tensions reveal a deep-seated alienation from modernity and liberalism. One of the traditional tasks of political philosophy is to explore moral psychology, drawing out its implications for the stability of regimes; this is as true of the early John Rawls as it was of Plato. Why fundamentalism should be so appealing to so many is in part a question of moral psychology; its popularity has implications for the viability of democratic liberalism. It is therefore problematic that contemporary political philosophers should pay it so little sustained attention.

How might liberals remedy this problem? Focusing on his native Canada, Charles Taylor (b. 1931) has argued that American-style liberalism is unable to conceptualize and accommodate the needs of ethnic and tribal communities. He attributes this inability to the conception of citizenship on which such liberalism is premised. Crudely put, citizens are conceived of as having moral capacities necessary for social cooperation and for embracing some comprehensive moral view. They are also conceived of as having the rights necessary to protect the exercise of those capacities. Those capacities are, however, characterized without reference to the particular ends and attachments citizens actually have. According to Taylor, political philosophy appropriate to a pluralistic society would begin with a very different conception of citizenship, one which defines citizenship with reference to the sub-communities to which citizens belong, the ties they have, and the goods they pursue in common. Taylor argues that liberals could adopt this conception of citizenship without surrendering their traditional commitment to the most cherished individual rights and liberties.

Philosophers concerned with nationalism and ethnicity are debating the nature of citizenship, and many have put forward variants of Taylor's suggestion. Their proposals are interesting and important, and they promise to shed some light on the role of ethnic sub-communities within liberal democracies. They are, however, at a preliminary stage of development. Some have thought that philosophers interested in religion's political role could make use of them. They have thought it possible that a theory which defines citizenship with reference to ethnic and national attachments could be exploited to yield a definition of citizenship that refers to religious attachments as well. This, they have thought, is the best way to accommodate religious fundamentalism and conservatism and, perhaps, to bring fundamentalists into the liberal fold.

One obvious problem with this suggestion is that it threatens both citizens' freedom and their equality. It threatens their freedom because, by tying their political identity to their religious identity, it raises questions about how free citizens so understood would be to change their religious identities and religious observance at will. It threatens their equality because it raises the possibility that those citizens with different religious identities will be treated differently at the hands of government – enjoying different rights and liberties, and perhaps subject to different systems of marital, inheritance, and property law. In light of such difficulties, other philosophers have concluded that the best way to cope with the demands religious communities place on the modern

state is to keep liberal theory intact, and to look for principles of accommodation that are consistent with its core commitments. Recent and lively discussions of global justice and cosmopolitanism promise to shed fresh light on the questions traditional religious communities pose for political theory. Penetrating and philosophically informed studies of conditions in democracies outside Europe and North America – as in work on India by Martha Nussbaum (b. 1947) – promise to show how well what Gray called “the new liberalism” can be exported.

## Religion and Public Philosophy

The question of whether liberalism is compatible with many forms of theism is, of course, an important one. In last decade and a half of the twentieth century, there was renewed interest among American religious ethicists in John Courtney Murray’s attempt to show the compatibility of Catholicism and American democracy. Murray (1904–67), a Jesuit priest, argued that American democracy depends upon what he called a “public consensus.” Among the objects of this consensus are principles of justice, the ideal of civility, and values associated with education and public morality. These norms provide the basis for “the public philosophy,” a working philosophy for American public life.

The scope of the public philosophy, while not comprehensive, is considerably broader than that of political liberalism. Civility, for example, is a value that should be realized, not only in public political argument, but in many other interactions among citizens as well. This breadth of scope, Murray thought, is crucial to the transmission of the public philosophy and the maintenance of the American moral consensus. Citizens learn to participate in the moral consensus only if its constitutive values are systematically fostered by and realized in a wide range of institutions. Murray argued that the core values of the American public philosophy can be found in the natural law ethics explicitly embraced by Roman Catholicism and congenial to many other religions as well (see Chapter 69, Natural Law Ethics). It follows that these religions are not merely compatible with liberal democracy, but also supportive of it. Murray concluded that churches and religious schools are among the institutions which form and transmit the American public philosophy.

A generation later, a number of American religious thinkers returned to Murray’s work for inspiration. Religious thought and language, they argue, can inspire innovative policy and help to build political coalitions in support of social justice. Religious ties, they maintain, can rebuild a sense of community eroded by social mobility and an emphasis on autonomy. Religious education can foster the virtues of self-sacrifice and commitment to the common good on which liberal democracy depends. The attempt to update Murray’s thought and elucidate its implications for contemporary American politics is among the most exciting projects in religious social ethics. It is not, however, without its critics.

Some criticize Murray for focusing on religious liberty and neglecting economic justice. Others read his defense of rights as an endorsement of modernity’s most corrosive ingredient, the element of modern politics that destroys bonds of community. David Hollenbach, one of the most notable thinkers associated with the Murray revival,

has replied that human rights should be understood as “the minimum conditions for life in community.” Among these conditions, Hollenbach argues, are a guaranteed standard of living and the opportunity to use one’s gifts in community life. Hollenbach’s theory of rights is therefore sensitive to the distribution of wealth and opportunity. Because human rights have an irreducibly communitarian element, Hollenbach argues, their defense is not a commitment to the individualism that weakens communal bonds.

The Murray revival faces other serious difficulties. First, recall that consensus on a public philosophy is consensus on a moral view with broad though not comprehensive scope. Such consensus requires agreement on the values to be fostered in public education and media of communication; important among these values, Murray thought, were values connected with human sexuality. The diversity of mores in the contemporary United States poses serious obstacles to such a consensus. Second, organized religions in the United States exercise looser control over their members now than they did in Murray’s time. This diversity of opinion within churches extends to the very issues on which Murray thought there should be a public consensus among religions. The Catholic Church, for example, has been unable to build consensus on sexual morality among its American members despite vigorous efforts. This suggests that even if there were moral consensus among the official representatives of various organized American religions, religious organizations would be incapable of building a consensus that includes most of their members.

### Anti-liberalism

I have so far focused on political philosophers sympathetic to liberalism in some form. There are, however, many thinkers who are unsympathetic to it because of the moral culture fostered by liberal democratic politics. In the name of toleration, these thinkers claim, citizens of liberal democracies come to believe that virtually any way of life is as morally worthy as any other, and that matters of public morality should be left to individuals. As a consequence, they say, liberal democratic societies are insufficiently respectful of inviolable moral norms like those forbidding euthanasia, abortion, and assisted suicide, and insufficiently committed to traditional values.

Many of these critics are religious, spanning the doctrinal spectrum. Pope John Paul II (1920–2005) of the Roman Catholic Church has written a series of public letters called “encyclicals” that have been sharply critical of the capitalist and democratic West. The culture of the West, John Paul argues, inclines increasingly to materialism, moral relativism, and the worship of technology (see Chapter 66, Theism and Technology). It thereby neglects the essential spirituality of humankind and leaves human beings spiritually hungry. Culture can be renewed, John Paul says, only by turning to God and returning to the moral absolutes articulated in scripture, the Christian tradition, and the natural law. The evangelical Protestant Stanley Hauerwas argues that the cultures of liberal democracies like the United States systematically misunderstand and trivialize religion. In response, Hauerwas calls on religious citizens to maintain a separatist and critical attitude toward secular liberal society. He urges them to dedicate themselves to communities animated by religious faith where traditional values are nourished.

The most philosophically powerful of liberalism's critics is Alasdair MacIntyre (b. 1929). MacIntyre recognizes the pluralism of large industrial democracies, but argues that liberals have drawn the wrong conclusion from it. While liberals hope to build on a common political morality, MacIntyre argues that any such morality relies upon concepts the applications of which are deeply contested. Even concepts like "justice" and "equality" on which liberals like Rawls hope to secure agreement are, MacIntyre contends, used differently by those who endorse different moral views. Some might hope to settle this disagreement by looking at paradigmatic cases in which the demands of justice are satisfied. MacIntyre argues in reply that agreement on the requisite paradigms is impossible to secure. Liberalism presents itself as a moral view neutral among various contending theories. MacIntyre concludes that, as a view committed to its own ways of life and paradigms of justice, it is but one more contender in a series of deep moral disagreements.

MacIntyre argues that the human good consists in a life characterized by the cultivation and harmonious exercise of the moral virtues. From this claim, plus MacIntyre's analysis of moral disagreement, three consequences follow. First, in large and pluralistic societies, there can at present be no meaningful and terminable debate about how those societies might promote the true human good. Second, different and incompatible values regulate the public life of liberal societies on the one hand, and smaller communities, including religious communities, within such societies on the other. Consider, for example, MacIntyre's penetrating studies of truth-telling, written in the early 1990s. Truth-telling, he argued, imposes different requirements and admits of different exceptions in different spheres of life. It is therefore extremely difficult for citizens to develop consistent attitudes toward truth-telling, to exercise the virtue of veracity consistently or to combine that virtue with others. Similar claims are, he says, true of the other virtues. Third, because of the impossibility of realizing and combining the virtues under modern conditions, it follows that the true human good is unavailable, or available with great difficulty, in the most developed societies. MacIntyre echoes Aristotle in claiming that a life of virtue is most easily led in relatively small communities with a high degree of moral consensus. Since the modern state is far from being such a community, MacIntyre, like Hauerwas, counsels withdrawal to what cultural, religious, and intellectual enclaves persist in liberal societies.

MacIntyre is more interested in the question of what communities are necessary for realizing the true human good than he is in the reform of practical politics. This distance from politics is both a strength and a weakness of anti-liberalism generally. The anti-liberals are at their best as religiously-motivated social critics. They very effectively point out that, from the vantage point of various religious traditions, there appear to be deep human needs unfilled by liberal politics and deep moral problems with the culture it fosters. Political philosophy should, however, play a constructive as well as a critical role. The prevalence of theism and its profound impact on contemporary politics pose powerful challenges to political philosophers. Religion challenges them to explain the persistence of fundamentalism and the alienation from liberal politics experienced by many religious believers. It challenges philosophers to develop new ways of thinking about human rights and the distribution of wealth, about the political promise and spiritual limitations of liberal democracy. In sum, the challenges of theism for

politics, and the problems with contemporary political philosophy, show how much remains to be done.

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## Theism and Toleration

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Toleration is the enduring of something disagreeable. Thus it is not indifference toward things that do not matter and it is not broad-minded celebration of differences. It involves a decision to forgo using powers of coercion, so it is not merely resignation at the inevitability of the disagreeable, although begrudging toleration can be granted when one believes that coercion, while possible, would come at too high a price. Tolerating another's actions is quite compatible with trying to change another's mind, as long as one relies on rational persuasion – or, perhaps, emotional appeals – rather than blunt threats or subtle brainwashing.

Religious toleration generally applies to *expressing* or *acting upon* theologically-related beliefs, although the mere *holding* of beliefs or the *persons* holding them have also been the objects of intolerance and toleration. In any case, religious toleration is not to be confused with secularization or erosion of religious devotion, although the resulting indifference toward another's religious expression may have behavioral manifestations that overlap those of toleration. And, in spite of some behavioral similarities, toleration is distinct from the sort of pluralistic ecumenicism that seeks consensus on central religious matters or views other religious beliefs as simply different routes to similar goals (see Chapter 84, Religious Pluralism). We can take religion extremely seriously, believe that we are clearly right and others are egregiously wrong on a matter of huge and holy significance, and still decide to tolerate their propagation of the error.

### Story of Theistic Intolerance

But why would we do that? Here is a widely accepted story about theistic intolerance (see, for example, Rawls 1993, pp. xxi–xxiv; and Fotion and Elfstrom 1992, pp. 75–8). When humans thought the gods were local and their concerns provincial, we could pledge allegiance to them without insisting that everyone else do so. Hence polytheism was quite compatible with religious toleration or, just as likely, indifference toward the other's belief. (Of course, the human tendency throughout most of our history to be suspicious and disdainful of differences made it also compatible with religious intolerance, especially since religious differences tend to rationalize and to pump up the intensity of dislikes that might begin with ethnic, economic, or other differences.) Even when



some of us thought our god was the most powerful among many gods – and a jealous god at that – we did not require outsiders to agree. In fact, even when we worshipped the one true, creator God, we did not insist or even desire that everyone else do so, especially since God's call seemed directed primarily to our own group. Hence, even a monotheism with universal implications can avoid clashing with unbelievers.

However, when God revealed to us a universal doctrine and called on us to teach it to all peoples as the exclusive way to eternal salvation, mandating us to make disciples of all nations, then we could not have a *laissez faire* attitude toward unbelief or apostasy. Why should we allow pernicious error a chance to mislead the gullible into perdition or to sow confusion and disorder? A righteous society, after all, is devoted to what God declares is right rather than to what humans declare as rights. And insofar as compassion compels us, we must consider primarily the eternal destiny of those in error or, if they are beyond redemption, the souls of those they might corrupt.

Thus the motivation for intolerance intensified when monotheism became not just universalistic but also exclusivistic and expansionistic, as it did with Christianity and, later, Islam. When the fighting and forced conversions occurred primarily at the borders, society could still flourish away from the infidels. However, when such religions turned religious wars in upon themselves – for example, as Islam did briefly after Muhammad's death in 632, and Christianity did at great length after the Reformation – life became uncertain at best and, at worst, nasty, brutish, and short. Indeed, even those theists who were disposed to be somewhat lenient toward unbelievers (especially if the latter professed a different sort of theism) on the grounds that unbelievers are generally inculpable for their erring ways, often became brutally intolerant toward apostasy; once one knows the truth, only culpable corruption could motivate rebellion against it.

### Locke, Liberalism, and the Rise of Toleration

One can debate many aspects of the above story, but it is close enough to the truth for one to appreciate John Locke's task as he wrote his *Letter concerning Toleration* (1689). England was going through the throes of the Restoration and the Glorious Revolution, including the conflicts between the state church (Anglican) and the dissenters, and worrying about a possible Catholic heir to the throne. Thirty years earlier, in several unpublished essays, Locke had argued that religious toleration was impractical because it would lead to civil unrest. But in the *Letter* he argues that what we know about history and human nature shows that toleration is necessary for civil peace:

It is not the diversity of Opinions, (which cannot be avoided) but the refusal of Toleration to those that are of different Opinions, (which might have been granted) that has produced all the Bustles and Wars, that have been in the Christian World, upon account of Religion. The Heads and Leaders of the Church, moved by Avarice and insatiable desire of Dominion, making use of the immoderate Ambition of Magistrates, and the credulous Superstition of the giddy Multitude, have incensed and animated them against those that dissent from themselves; by preaching unto them, contrary to the Laws of the Gospel and to the Precepts of Charity, That Schismatics and Hereticks are to be outed of their Possessions, and destroyed. (Locke 1983 [1689], p. 55)



This pragmatic appeal to prudence probably was the most persuasive point to those exhausted by the carnage and terror of religious wars that, at best, produced uneasy and distressingly temporary truces. But Locke spent much of his *Letter* on the conceptual point that true religion inherently requires “the inward persuasion of the Mind ... [making] Penalties in this case absolutely impertinent; because they are not proper to convince the mind” (p. 27). So coerced conversions are irrational not only because they are imprudent, but also because they are downright self-contradictory:

I may grow rich by an Art that I take not delight in; I may be cured of some Disease by Remedies that I have not Faith in; but I cannot be saved by a Religion that I distrust, and by a Worship that I abhor. It is in vain for an Unbeliever to take up the outward shew of another mans Profession. Faith only, and inward Sincerity, are the things that procure acceptance with God. (p. 38)

Locke’s “inward persuasion” argument is forceful, but it does require a few more premises to yield anything like a liberal argument for full religious toleration. What if theological truth were obvious to the unbiased mind? Then one could accept the need for inward persuasion and still force the unbeliever to give the truth a fair hearing. Thus Locke requires an epistemology that rubs against the view (arguably his own) that reason is sufficient for Christian belief. Interestingly, earlier theologians such as Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin used the inwardness argument (Little, Kelsay, and Sachedina 1988, pp. 15–20). Indeed, Aquinas accepted the added epistemological point that an unbeliever’s conscience could be inculpable when it rejects Christ, as well as the theological and moral claim that such a conscience should remain free. This latter claim involves a normative principle for toleration that goes beyond Locke’s point about the logical irrationality of coercion. However, Aquinas’ and Calvin’s epistemology did not allow that a believer could become an apostate or heretic with an inculpable conscience, so they had trouble extending toleration to important intramural Christian differences. Thus, for the toleration of different sects, Locke must argue that intelligent people of good will can be equally well informed and still differ on important points of doctrine and liturgy, points that each side regards as crucial to salvation.

Even then, Locke’s pragmatic and logical arguments would hardly yield toleration in the sense of equal religious liberty. Locke notoriously argued for intolerance of Catholics and atheists, his reasons combining a purely practical concern about public order and safety with the quaint view that the promises of Catholics and atheists could not be trusted, the former because they pledged allegiance to a foreign prince (the pope) and the latter because only those who believe in divine reward and punishment have sufficient motive for fidelity. These latter views are peripheral to Locke’s main position on toleration – he probably would allow empirical evidence to change his mind as he did on the causes of civil unrest – but even then he would need further considerations for full religious tolerance. So far his view is quite compatible with various forms of discrimination against religious minorities. Islam, for example, has traditionally allowed other theists to practice their faith, but has usually discriminated against them with special taxes and with restrictions on propagating their views. Indeed, the Qur’an states that there can be no compulsion in religion (2:256). It thereby agrees with Locke and Aquinas and Calvin about the need for inward freedom, although, for reasons

similar to those of Aquinas and Calvin, not allowing it for apostates. Thus the “no compulsion” view is quite compatible with many forms of discrimination that do not coerce belief. Islam means “surrender” and, although belief (*imam*) cannot be coerced, Muslims can use coercion, even holy war (*jihad*), to subdue unbelievers to a particular polity (Little, Kelsay, and Sachedina 1988, pp. 66–7). To reject such discrimination, one needs something like liberalism’s separation of church and state.

Here arises an important historical difference between Christianity and Islam. It can be argued that, until recently, Islam has never had to confront the issue of separating church and state because, until recently, there were not two institutions about which the question of separation could be raised. As Islam delivered the message, it also set up political structures (using tribes and caliphs) that embodied its moral and social implications, appealing to a religious law (*Shari’a*) that tends not to distinguish religious, moral, and political duties. Thus Islam did not develop an institutional church distinct from its development as a political reality (Little, Kelsay, and Sachedina 1988, p. 85). Christianity, on the other hand, was an often-persecuted minority for several hundred years after its founding, and it quickly developed an ecclesiastical hierarchy that argued for the wisdom of mutual respect between the two different institutions of church and state. The early Christians appealed to the teachings of both Jesus and Paul to argue for a distinction between the realms of Caesar and of the church, although there was room for debate about how to handle overlapping responsibilities. Thus any later tendencies toward theocracy had to develop in spite of rather than because of Christianity’s scriptures and early history. And when the consequences of religious wars showed them to be folly, Christianity had the theological resources to take seriously not just Locke’s arguments about the irrationality of religious persecution but also his advocating the separation of church and state, a doctrine that developed into liberalism’s demand for a religiously neutral state.

The classic statement of this demand is J. S. Mill’s *On Liberty*, where, right after he notes that intolerance is so natural to humans that religious freedom owes more to religious indifference than to principle (Mill 1978 [1859], p. 8), he asserts his “one very simple principle” that “the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number is self-protection” (p. 9). This principle by itself will not yield religious freedom because even the Inquisition could be defended in terms of society’s self-protection from the harmful effects of heresy. So Mill also needs his controversial distinction between conduct that concerns others and that which concerns only oneself (p. 73), and his even more improbable relegation of most religious matters – including monogamy – to the latter, private sphere (p. 89). When we combine this understanding of the relationship between society and the individual with a moral principle of respect for the individual and her conscience and autonomy, we get classical liberalism’s case for full toleration of religious practices – the contentious but peaceful coexistence of different religions in a neutral state.

Although the early history and teachings of Christianity enabled it to become quite receptive to this separation of church and state, we should note that it need not accept classical liberalism’s reasons for the division of labor. For example, communitarians, who have a more organic view of society and thereby reject Mill’s individualism, can ground their toleration of religious expression in religious awe toward persons they

perceive as imagers of God. Indeed, Tinder has persuasively argued that reverence toward the sanctity of God's children is a much firmer foundation for toleration than is Mill's dubious appeal to utility or secular appeals to a universal dignity that empirically seems quite unequal (Tinder 1976, p. 114). Of course, not all Christians noticed this aspect of their doctrine during the sad story of religious intolerance, and prudence probably did more than principle to stop the carnage of religious wars. But if Mendus is right in thinking that stable toleration must be based on respect rather than expediency (Mendus 1989, p. 111), then it is important to notice that the religious and moral implications of being created in God's image provide many theists with a robust reason for principled toleration. Imagery of God are hearers and givers of reasons and, especially regarding decisions that are central to their identity, one may not overly manipulate them, even out of love.

### Toleration, Tolerance, and Affirmation

The arguments for religious toleration mentioned so far can be placed on a spectrum from the purely pragmatic, on one side, to the purely principled on the other. Although there are no sharp divisions in this spectrum, toleration based on protecting one's own self-interest (should the wrong sect get into power) is grounded quite differently from toleration based on an analysis of the character of true religious belief or on an appeal to moral or religious obligation. But all of these arguments must be distinguished from another consideration that Mill introduced, namely the positive appreciation of diversity. Notice that Locke was not one to celebrate religious diversity; he merely argued the irrationality of not enduring it. One could go further than Locke and argue for actually cooperating with disagreeable practices. Thus an employer might cooperatively set up work schedules that accommodate an employee's disagreeable Sabbath day practices and a society may empower minorities to broadcast disagreeable viewpoints. Mill and others have argued that it is prudent for individuals and societies to cooperate with the airing of what they see as errors, because that is how we correct our mistakes and arrive at better reasons and more truth. Theists also can argue for this motivation for cooperation if they have a view of revelation and hermeneutics which implies that human comprehension of God's will is inherently limited and fallible (see Chapter 82, *Philosophical Reflection on Revelation and Scripture*). This view would yield an epistemological humility that is theologically based and that not only tolerates but also enables the expression of what seems to be heresy, since the latter might give new insights into truth or, at least, the reasons for accepting it. But even such cooperation is consistent with viewing the other as being wrong in a disagreeable way.

Beginning with Mill, however, we see arguments not simply for enduring diversity as conducive to peace or progress, but also for celebrating, approving, and affirming it. Thus he claimed that public opinion, and not just legal coercion, was an undesirable constraint on human flourishing (Mill 1978, p. 9). Indeed, he argued that society's being judgmental about diversity maimed individuals in a way similar to the Chinese practice of foot-binding (p. 66). Such broad-minded affirmation of differences should not be confused with toleration. Some have suggested we use "tolerance" to refer to the

welcoming of differences and reserve “toleration” for merely enduring them, arguing along Mill’s line that liberal democracies should nurture such tolerance in ways that would make toleration unnecessary and even offensive (Fotion and Elfstrom 1992, p. 124). Others have suggested that “tolerance” should simply refer to the character disposition that inclines one toward acts or practices of toleration (Newman 1982, p. 5). It does seem that tolerance sometimes connotes broad-minded approval of important differences and not merely the tendency to put up with them. However the verb “tolerate,” the adjective “tolerant,” and the noun “intolerance” seem to associate with both toleration and tolerance, so linguistic legislation aimed at separating them is unlikely to succeed. Moreover, Mill and some liberals may underestimate how personal integrity and group identity require the judgment that many important differences are disagreeably wrong, even if tolerable. One may be able to welcome any number of ethnic, cultural, and lifestyle diversities as adding spice to a pleasing pluralism and yet regard many moral and religious differences as sad and disagreeable wrongs that one should argue against even while tolerating them (Mouw and Griffioen 1993, p. 18). Rawls, for example, while not giving up his hope that political liberalism can rely on an overlapping agreement about central issues of justice, now believes that the differences we find in our pluralistic society are so deep and so wide and concern matters that are so central to what makes life meaningful, that we cannot hope for an emerging consensus about ethics and the good life (Rawls 1993, p. xvi). And this conflict is between what he calls *reasonable* doctrines, not just between reasonable views and those of Nazis or the Ku Klux Klan. Thus one can respect a position as reasonable but also regard it as wrong and disagreeable. One can tolerate people’s acting on such positions while not approving of them and, indeed, while trying to change their minds through rational persuasion or even public opinion.

Instead of hoping that toleration will gradually be replaced by approval, affirmation, and admiration of differences, it may be more realistic as well as more consistent with personal integrity and cultural identity to cultivate the attitude of tolerance as the limited but valuable disposition toward appropriate toleration. It is important to underscore *appropriate*, since there are many behaviors – not all of them criminal – toward which tolerance would not be a virtue. It is also important to notice that one can respect another’s holding a view that one regards as wrong. Often the mistake one thinks the other is making is clearly not the result of culpable ignorance, stubborn prejudice, or corrupt consciousness. Rather, one can see that the other’s believing the error is quite reasonable from the other’s point of view, and also that the other’s point of view is itself what a reasonable person might accept. An orthodox Jewish physician, for example, might respect the decision-making of a Jehovah’s Witness who refuses a lifesaving blood transfusion for an infant and still regard the decision as disagreeably – even tragically – wrong. Indeed, the physician may be intolerant of the other’s action, seeking a coercive court order to override it, and still respect the other’s view as reasonable. What Rawls calls “comprehensive doctrines” (1993, p. 58) are often simultaneously reasonable and conflicting. In a pluralistic society this sort of conflict will usually call for mutual and respectful toleration. But sometimes it may call for respectful intolerance, especially when innocent third parties may be harmed by a reasonable but wrong decision. Such respect is not the same as the refusal to blame or the willingness to forgive, which can apply to people holding unreasonable views. And respect need not

be predicated on skepticism, relativism, or nihilism, since it can regard the other as definitely wrong, albeit in a reasonable way.

Thus one can retain in tolerance the notion of enduring disagreeable error and still be open-minded about whether the error is reasonable. And one can do this without a generalized broad-minded delight in all tolerable diversity. Moreover, the criteria one uses for deciding what is reasonable and the different (though perhaps overlapping) criteria one uses for deciding what one can tolerate – or even cooperate with – imply that in a pluralistic society various combinations of these attitudes (or their opposites) are quite possible.

### A Remaining Question

A remaining question concerns the extent to which, in a pluralistic society, theological beliefs should influence advocacy and decisions on coercive legislation. This is the “religion and the public square” debate. In the United States the debate is often framed by the First Amendment protection of “the free exercise” of religion and the prohibition of laws “respecting an establishment of religion.” Does this mean a complete separation of church and state, and a religiously neutral state? Does it mean that citizens must ignore their deeply religious beliefs, which shape their identity and inform their idea of the good, when voting for legislation and legislators? Or does it mean that they can use such beliefs when making up their own minds but that the “public square” debates may appeal only to “public reasons,” even when the debaters themselves are less motivated by them than by their own religious beliefs? Or, even more restrictively, should citizens limit the public square debates – on abortion, for example – to reasons that not only are completely independent of any theologically based beliefs but which also provide sufficient political motivation for themselves? (See Chapter 70, Religion, Law, and Politics.)

Rawls is perhaps the most influential philosopher in this debate, arguing (1993, part 2) for a political conception of liberalism that may overlap, but which can also stand free of, all of the reasonable and conflicting comprehensive doctrines about the good life that one finds in a democratic, pluralistic society. Others argue that a thicker conception of the good is necessary for politics, a conception that may include irreducibly religious – even theistic – elements (Mouw and Griffioen 1993). The question is whether and how one can allow religious beliefs into public discussions or decisions about what is tolerable without thereby impinging on appropriate “free exercise” of minority religious outlooks. The on-going debate over marriage rights illustrates the difficulty of drawing an uncontroversial line. For many theists, this issue is an important part of the current debate about theism and toleration.

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## Sin and Original Sin

PHILIP L. QUINN

According to an ancient conception, human faults are transgressions that pollute or defile, that is, produce stains or blemishes which somehow infect the transgressor from without. Because such transgressions need not be morally evil actions, the pollution they produce need not be identified with moral guilt. Hence the remedy for such pollution can be a ritual of purification and need not be a response appropriate to moral guilt. However, when human faults are conceived within the context of a relationship to a personal deity, it is natural to think of them as offenses against the divine will. And when the deity is taken to be morally perfect, it is also natural to think of human faults as morally evil actions that produce guilt. The concept of sin is the concept of a human fault that offends a morally perfect God and brings with it guilt.

The natural home of the concept of sin is in the major theistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. They share the idea that personal or actual sins are individual actions that are contrary to the will of a morally perfect deity. In the Hebrew Bible such sins are deviations from the norms of holiness that define the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and the chosen people. According to the Christian New Testament, Jesus teaches that human wrongdoing offends the person whom he addresses as Father. The Qur'an portrays personal sins as acts in opposition to Allah that spring from human pride. The first section of this chapter discusses personal sins.

The doctrine of original sin is distinctively Christian. Its scriptural warrant is to be found in the Epistles of Paul, and an interpretation of the Pauline texts worked out by Augustine of Hippo in the course of his controversy with the Pelagians has had an enormous influence on Western Christianity. The second section of this chapter is devoted to the Augustinian conception of original sin and the elaboration of it in the writings of Anselm of Canterbury and Jonathan Edwards. On the Augustinian view, the Fall of Adam and Eve recounted in Genesis 3 had catastrophic consequences for the human race. All the descendants of the first humans, except Jesus and his mother, inherit from Adam and Eve guilt for their first sin and so are born bearing a burden of guilt. Because it attributes innate guilt to humans, this account of original sin is morally problematic. The final section of this chapter focuses on the alternatives to the Augustinian conception set forth by John Locke, Immanuel Kant, Søren Kierkegaard, and Richard Swinburne.

## Personal Sins

Personal sins are individual human actions that offend God; they are actions contrary to the will or commands of God. Because God is taken to be morally perfect (see Chapter 30, Goodness) by the major theistic religions, all moral wrongdoing is contrary to the will of God and hence sinful. According to divine command ethics, an action is morally wrong just in case and only because it is contrary to a divine command (see Chapter 68, Divine Command Ethics). On this view, if God did not exist and so there were no divine commands, no actions would be either morally wrong or sinful.

Most theists do not subscribe to such a divine command conception of ethics. According to the majority view, much of morality is independent of the existence and will of God. Divine prohibitions do not make such things as murder, torture, or rape wrong; they serve instead to reinforce an independent morality. Murder is, so to speak, doubly wrong by virtue of being forbidden by God; it is both a wrong against the victim and a wrong against God. But murder would still be morally wrong even if it were not sinful because God did not exist. For actions of this type, moral wrongness is independent of sinfulness.

Not all actions are of this type. It is morally wrong not to express gratitude to benefactors. If God created us and our lives are on the whole good, we have a duty to express gratitude to God for the gift of life. It would be morally wrong and hence sinful to fail to do so. However, if there is no God, life is not a gift and we have no duty to express gratitude to God if we have good lives. In that case it would be neither morally wrong nor sinful to fail to express gratitude to God. So some omissions are such that both their moral wrongness and their sinfulness depend on the existence and actions of God. For such omissions, moral wrongness is not independent of sinfulness.

On the majority view, then, two kinds of personal sin can be distinguished. There are actions or omissions that are morally wrong whether or not God exists and are also personal sins if God exists. And there are actions or omissions that are neither morally wrong nor personal sins if God does not exist but are both morally wrong and personal sins if God exists.

A distinction between objective and subjective personal sin can also be drawn. A human person who does something objectively offensive to God sins objectively and acquires objective guilt. A human person who does something he or she believes to be offensive to God sins subjectively and acquires subjective guilt. Theists who believe that an erring conscience binds will want to allow for cases in which, on account of a mistaken belief about the moral wrongness of an action, a person does what is subjectively but not objectively wrong and so sins subjectively but not objectively. The guilt a personal sin brings with it renders the sinner liable to punishment by God if the sinner satisfies appropriate conditions of responsibility for the deed. A person who sins both objectively and subjectively and whose true beliefs about what offends God are well justified may deserve severe punishment. But a person who sins objectively but not subjectively and whose lack of true beliefs about what offends God does not result from culpable ignorance may deserve little or no punishment.

Christians who hold that hell is a place of everlasting divine retributive punishment for serious personal sins sometimes try to justify belief in such a harsh doctrine of hell

by claiming that serious personal sins are infinitely offensive to God (see Chapter 74, Resurrection, Heaven, and Hell). It would seem that only an infinite offense could suffice to justify a punishment that is infinite by virtue of being everlastingly protracted in time. But it is hard to make sense of the idea of a personal sin being infinitely offensive to God, and the supposition that a human sinner could deserve infinite retributive punishment by a morally perfect deity is very problematic. Christians need not adopt this harsh conception of hell, since their traditions allow for alternatives to it. If they opt for a less harsh alternative, they can argue that the relations among personal sin, guilt before God, and desert of punishment are parallel to and no more problematic, morally speaking, than the relations among wrongdoing, moral guilt, and desert of sanctions of various sorts in common morality. This is not the case for Augustinian original sin.

### Augustinian Original Sin

The development of the doctrine of original sin begins with the story of the Fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. When they disobey a divine command not to eat the fruit of a certain tree, God punishes them by subjecting them to toil, suffering, and death. Being subject to such things is part of their legacy to us. But the story does not say that they are punishments in our case, and it does not suggest that we have inherited from the first humans a burden of guilt. That suggestion is made by the Epistles of Paul.

Paul reads the Hebrew Bible as full of anticipations of things that only come to fruition in the life of Jesus Christ. His powerful rhetorical contrast of Adam and Christ begins thus: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world and with sin death, death thus coming to all men in as much as all sinned" (Romans 5:12). It concludes thus: "Just as through one man's disobedience all became sinners, so through one man's obedience all shall become just" (Romans 5:19). The carefully balanced contrasts in the second of these verses suggest that all become guilty as a result of Adam's disobedience. The obedience (good action) of one man (Christ) is that through which all shall (future) become just (positive ethical status), and so, if the set of contrasts is to be complete, the disobedience (bad action) of another man (Adam) must be that through which all became (past) sinners (negative ethical status). But this would imply that all acquired the negative ethical status of being sinners through Adam's sin, which would make sense on the assumption that guilt is somehow transmitted from Adam to his progeny in a way that parallels the transfer of justice from Christ to those who benefit from his atoning work (see Chapter 73, Atonement, Justification, and Sanctification).

Augustine explicitly makes this assumption. He insists that "when the first couple were punished by the judgment of God, the whole human race, which was to become Adam's posterity through the first woman, was present in the first man" (1958 [426], p. 271). All humans were present in Adam, according to Augustine, because human nature itself was present in Adam's semen. And he goes on to claim that "because this nature has been soiled by sin and doomed to death and justly condemned, no man was to be born of man in any other condition" (1958, p. 279). On Augustine's view, then, all of us are born soiled by sin and justly condemned, and this condition is part of what

we would today refer to as our genetic endowment, since it is transmitted biologically from Adam to his descendants by means of male semen. When he tries to defend this astonishing doctrine of innate and biologically inherited sin and guilt against his Pelagian opponent Julian of Eclanum, who rejects it, Augustine frequently appeals to the authority of Pauline texts such as Romans 5:12 and 5:19.

Many contemporary biblical scholars doubt the legitimacy of the appeal to Romans 5:12, arguing that Augustine misunderstood that verse because he read it in Latin translation rather than the original Greek. Apparently he took it to say that through one man sin entered the world and with sin death, death thus coming to all men, *in whom* all sinned (rather than *in as much as* all sinned), and he then mistakenly supposed that the final clause referred back to the one man, Adam, which led him to conclude that Adam's sin brought about not only universal death but also universal sin and guilt. But even if this conclusion is not supported by Romans 5:12, it does seem to be supported by Romans 5:19, and so it has some basis in scriptural texts. The Augustinian view of original sin was accepted by most Western Christian thinkers for more than a millennium. It bears a striking resemblance to the ancient conception of a pollution that infects people from without. Christians often describe the sacrament of baptism, which is a ritual of purification, as cleansing the soul from the stain of original sin.

The Augustinian doctrine of original sin was elaborated in the work of great medieval philosophical theologians such as Anselm. On his view, each human person is a metaphysical composite that includes both a nature, which makes him or her human like others, and a principle of individuation, which makes her or him a particular person, distinct from all others. Original sin is contracted with human nature at the very origin of one's existence as a person; it is therefore innate and unavoidable. It consists of a will that lacks proper orientation because it is not subject to God's will. Anselm is innovative in characterizing the process whereby sin and guilt are transmitted from Adam and Eve to their progeny in terms of a two-way principle that is causal but not specifically biological. It states that "as what is personal passes over to the nature, so what is natural passes over to the person" (1969 [1100], p. 202). By the first half of this principle, the sin Adam and Eve committed when they ate the forbidden fruit caused human nature itself to become sinful; by its second half, sinful human nature in turn causes their descendants to be sinful and guilty from the first moment they possess it. And Anselm's logical acuity permits him to draw a shocking consequence from his elaboration of the Augustinian doctrine. It is that infants who die unbaptized, before having committed any personal sins of their own and so with only the stain of original sin on their souls, are condemned by God to exclusion from the kingdom of heaven.

Critics of Augustine and Anselm have argued that moral guilt cannot be transmitted from one person to another by biological or other kinds of causal mechanisms. If the critics are correct, the Augustinian doctrine of original sin needs revision. Is there a way to understand how all of us could become guilty on account of the first sin of the first humans without assuming that guilt is transmitted causally from them to us? The federal theology of the Reformation proposed that we become guilty by virtue of Adam's sin not by way of causal transmission but by way of divine imputation. According to federalism, Adam was, by covenant with God, the federal head or representative of the

entire human race. All of Adam's posterity underwent probation or testing in him, and so guilt for his sin is justly imputed to them by God in consequence of his having fallen while acting by covenant as their representative. Federal theologians allow that a disposition to commit personal sins is causally transmitted from Adam to his progeny, but they insist that guilt for Adam's first sin extends to his descendants because God imputes it to them in accord with the terms of a covenant. Jonathan Edwards uses the ideas of federal theology as one strand in his defense of a traditional doctrine of original sin; he describes Adam in legal terms as a "public person, or common head" (Edwards 1970 [1758], p. 396).

It is, however, far from clear that this revision suffices to render the doctrine of original sin morally unproblematic. Although our legal and moral practices allow for circumstances in which one person can be held liable for the actions of another, they do not allow for circumstances in which one person can become guilty of another's wrongdoing. It seems that one must have performed an act to be guilty of it, and it also seems that one person cannot perform another's act. So the doctrine of original sin remains objectionable even when it is revised along the lines proposed by the federal theologians. Criticism of it abounds in modern philosophy.

### Modern Philosophical Critiques

Christians would have fewer reasons to endorse the harsh Augustinian doctrine of original sin if it could be shown to lack the sort of scriptural support Augustine took it to have. John Locke tried to show this by reinterpreting the Pauline texts cited by Augustine. In his *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St Paul*, his procedure is to quote a verse, then to offer his own paraphrase of it, and finally to argue for the paraphrase in an appended note. The paraphrase of Romans 5:12 goes as follows: "Wherefore to give you a state of the whole matter from the beginning. You must know, that as by the act of one man Adam the father of us all, sin entered into the world, and death, which was the punishment annexed to the offence of eating the forbidden fruit entered by that sin for that Adams posterity thereby became mortal" (Locke 1987 [1707], p. 523). Having substituted "became mortal" for "sinned" at the end of the verse, Locke has blocked both the inference that sin is inherited and the inference that death is in Adam's posterity a punishment for sin. In the note he tries to justify this substitution by claiming that Paul is here employing metonymy, that is, substituting the cause for the effect, sin in Adam being the cause of his mortality and, through him, the cause also of the mortality of his progeny.

Similarly, the paraphrase of Romans 5:19 is this: "For as by one mans disobedience many were brought into a state of mortality which is the state of sinners soe by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous, i e be restord to life again as if they were not sinners" (Locke 1987, p. 527). The justificatory note is terse: "*Sinners*. Here St Paul uses the same metonymie as above ver. 12 putting *sinners* for *mortal* whereby the Antithesis to righteous is the more lively" (p. 527). If Locke's metonymy gambit were successful across the board, we could always paraphrase away talk of Adam's disobedience making his descendants sinners in favor of talk of Adam's disobedience making his descendants mortal, thereby undercutting the scriptural support for

Augustinian original sin. Unfortunately, many biblical scholars would deny that this Lockean stratagem is uniformly successful.

One might have philosophical grounds for rejecting Augustinian original sin even if one were unsure what to make of scriptural passages that seem to support it. In *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Kant rejects the doctrine of inherited sin and guilt, saying that “however the origin of moral evil in man is constituted, surely of all the explanations of the spread and propagation of this evil through all members and generations of our race, the most inept is that which describes it as descending to us as an *inheritance* from our first parents” (Kant 1960 [1793], p. 35). Yet Kant has a substitute for the doctrine of original sin in his philosophy of religion; it is his doctrine of radical evil in human nature. According to Kant, there is in all humans, as far as we can tell, a morally evil propensity to evil, and he once even calls it *peccatum originarium*.

A propensity, as Kant defines it, is a predisposition to crave a delight which, once experienced, arouses in its possessor an inclination to it. People with a propensity for whiskey, for example, do not desire whiskey before they first drink it, but once they have tried it they develop a craving for it. Kant regards propensities of this sort as physical because they belong to people considered as determined by laws of nature. Since what is determined by laws of nature is morally indifferent, physical propensities are morally indifferent. Hence if all propensities were physical, a propensity to evil in humans would not itself be morally evil. So there must be non-physical propensities if there is to be a morally evil propensity to evil in humans. According to Kant, nothing is morally evil but libertarian free acts and their products, and so a morally evil propensity to evil has to be a product of an exercise of libertarian freedom. He tells us that, though the propensity to evil can be represented as innate, it should not be represented as merely innate, for it should also be represented as brought by humans upon themselves. It can be represented as innate because, as the underlying ground of all morally evil actions in their lives, it is to be thought of as present in its possessors antecedent to all such actions and so represented temporally as present in them as far back as birth. It should be represented as brought by its possessors upon themselves because, being morally evil, it has to be a product of libertarian freedom for which its possessors can be held morally accountable. And it can be represented as brought by its possessors upon themselves, Kant thinks, because it can be thought of as, and actually is, the product of an atemporal act of noumenal libertarian freedom on the part of each of its possessors.

On Kant’s view, therefore, there is radical and innate evil in human nature only in the sense that, as far as we can tell, each and every human has brought upon himself or herself a morally evil propensity to evil by an act of noumenal libertarian freedom. This propensity is not in any way causally transmitted to us from our remote ancestors; in particular, it is no part of the genetic endowment that comes to us through sexual procreation. Nor is it divinely imputed to us. But because it is a product of the exercise of noumenal libertarian freedom, we are morally accountable and so guilty for having brought it upon ourselves. Whether Kantian radical evil makes better philosophical sense than Augustinian original sin depends heavily, of course, on the plausibility of Kant’s assumption that there are atemporal acts of noumenal libertarian freedom. Many philosophers do not find this assumption even remotely plausible.



In *The Concept of Anxiety*, Vigilius Haufniensis, Søren Kierkegaard's pseudonym, conducts a simple psychologically orienting deliberation on the dogmatic issue of hereditary sin. The result of this deliberation is the conclusion that there is no such thing as inherited sin and guilt. Haufniensis insists that every human is initially innocent. For every human individual, "innocence is always lost only by the qualitative leap of the individual" and "guilt breaks forth in the qualitative leap" (Kierkegaard 1980 [1844], pp. 37, 41). Like Kantian acts of noumenal libertarian freedom, qualitative leaps are not causally determined and so cannot be given deterministic scientific explanations. According to Haufniensis, we are like Adam and Eve in that we all leap directly from innocence into guilt and nothing inherited pushes us over the edge of the precipice. He tells us that "a person can say in profound earnestness that he was born in misery and that his mother conceived him in sin, but he can truly sorrow over this only if he himself brought guilt into the world and brought all this upon himself" (p. 38). So we become guilty only when we commit personal sins, which are free qualitative leaps in the wrong direction and for which we can be held morally accountable.

Although original sin has not been a major issue in philosophy of religion of the twentieth century, Christian philosophers such as Richard Swinburne have added to the criticism of the Augustinian doctrine (see Swinburne 1989, ch. 9). He acknowledges that a proneness to sin is innate in humans; it stems from strong selfish desires that are part of our evolutionary heritage. But because, like Kant and Kierkegaard, he holds a libertarian view of freedom, he insists that the bad desires in which the proneness to sin consists incline without necessitating and so do not suffice to bring about, or inevitably issue in, actual wrongdoing. And Swinburne emphatically rejects the doctrine of original guilt, according to which all of Adam's descendants are guilty for Adam's first sin. No one, he argues, can be guilty for the sins of another person unless he or she had an obligation to deter that person and failed to do so. Since no one alive today could have had an obligation to deter Adam and Eve from sinning, we cannot be guilty for their first sins. Swinburne notes that there is scriptural support for his view: "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him" (Ezekiel 18:20). According to Swinburne, the only exception to the prophet's claim is the guilt we acquire when we violate obligations to deter others from wrongdoing.

In my opinion, the critics of the Augustinian doctrine of original sin are correct in thinking that we are not born bearing a burden of guilt for the first sins of the first humans which comes to us by way of causal transmission or divine imputation (see Quinn 1992). We are guilty only for our own morally evil actions, and so we acquire guilt only by committing personal sins. Christians who share this opinion should also share Locke's concern to interpret biblical verses such as Romans 5:12 and 5:19 in ways that do not support the Augustinian doctrine.

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## Atonement, Justification, and Sanctification

JOHN E. HARE

This chapter is about three central Christian doctrines about God's work in our salvation, as these doctrines enter, or should enter, the philosophical discussion of the moral life. The theological labels for these doctrines vary in different traditions within Christianity, but I shall use the terms "atonement," "justification," and "sanctification."

### The Problem of the Moral Gap

The problem in philosophy which I shall address is the problem of understanding how it is possible for a human being to lead a life pleasing to God, and one which continues appropriately in heaven after physical death. The problem is not about whether we ought to lead such a life; but about the objection that, given the damage that sin has done to our natural capacities (see Chapter 72, Sin and Original Sin), we do not now have the ability to lead such a life, and hence cannot justly be held accountable for the failure to live it. Morality, as we are familiar with it, has a three-part structure. There is, first, a moral demand on us. This demand has been interpreted differently by different authors, but includes centrally, as Jesus put it, the demand to love our neighbors as ourselves. Within the Christian tradition, however, and in many places outside this tradition, there is agreement that this demand is too high for us to meet with the capacities we are born with and naturally develop. These capacities form the second part of the structure. Aristotle, for example, though he has a different conception of the best life, tells us that it "would be superior to the human level," but we ought not to follow the proverb writers, and "think human, since you are human," or "think mortal, since you are mortal"; rather, as far as we can, we ought to be immortal (1984, *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7.1177b 26–34). The third part of the structure is an at least possible being who not only does have the capacity to live a perfect life, but is seen as the source of the demand on us. In the Christian tradition, this being is God (see Chapter 25, Perfect Being Theology; and Chapter 30, Goodness). Moral theorists who do not like to talk of God describe a super-human standpoint (Henry Sidgwick [1981] talked of "the point of view of the universe," R. B. Brandt [1959] of an ideal observer, and R. M. Hare [1981] of an archangel), or a modified human being (John Rawls [1971] talked of a

counterfactual veil of ignorance about our particular place in society). The moral gap presents us with a problem, or antinomy; if it is not the case that we can live by the moral demand, then it is not the case that we ought to live by it. The doctrines that form the subject of this chapter are doctrines about how the holy being who is the third part of the structure intervenes to forgive our failures and to change our capacities (the second part of the structure), so that we become able to live by the demand (the first part of the structure). I have presented this account in greater detail in *The Moral Gap* (1996) and in *God and Morality* (2007).

Augustine presents this three-part structure in a way that might seem to fall foul of the principle that “ought” implies “can.” Augustine says, “God bids us do what we cannot, in order that we might know what we ought to seek from him” (1948, *On Grace and Free Will*, xvi.32). But the principle is in fact preserved; for what he thinks is impossible is not our *doing* what God bids, but our doing it *without God’s help*. The purpose of the law, Paul says, is to bring us to grace (Romans 4:14–16). Martin Luther compares us to children learning to walk, when their parent tells them to come, “or do this or that, only in order that it may appear how impotent they are, and that they may be compelled to call for the help of the parent’s hand” (1957, p. 152). Here the objection might be made that God is omnipotent; so that in this expanded sense of “can” (where it encompasses what I can do with God’s assistance) I can jump to the moon (see Chapter 27, Omnipotence). Surely this is expanding “can” too far. But in Christian doctrine God offers us the assistance to do what God asks us to do, and God does not ask us to jump to the moon. We have a real possibility of living the kind of life God wants us to live, not merely because God *can* help us to live it, but because God *offers* to help us live it (see Chapter 39, Providence).

## Kant

I will start with the philosophical discussion of these doctrines by Immanuel Kant, since his treatment has been influential in the subsequent discussion. Kant refers to what he calls Spener’s problem (after the famous Lutheran pietist), “How can we become *other* men and not merely better men (as if we were already good but only negligent about the degree of our goodness)?” (1996a, vol. 7, p. 54; I will refer to Kant from the Berlin Academy edition, by volume and page number.) We all of us start off, Kant holds, in subjection to what he calls “the evil maxim,” which tells us to put our own happiness first and duty second. We are thus corrupt in the very ground of our more specific maxims, all of which take their fundamental moral character from this one. Kant is clear that duty puts us under the good maxim, which reverses the order of incentives, telling us to follow after happiness only so long as the maxims of our actions pass the test of the categorical imperative. A life under the good maxim must, therefore, be possible for us, according to the principle that “ought” implies “can.” But how is this revolution in us to be accomplished, since the human propensity to evil is radical, and inextirpable by human powers? Kant says that our extirpation of the propensity could only occur through good maxims, and therefore cannot take place when the ultimate subjective ground of all our maxims is postulated as corrupt. Kant’s solution to this impasse is to appeal to “a higher, and for us inscrutable, assistance” (1996b, vol. 6, p. 45).

Kant concedes that Reason cannot, either in her theoretical or practical employment, *use* maxims about God's assistance. But we may be required nonetheless, he says, to make room in our belief for doctrines from special revelation which do not come to us through Reason, in order to escape what I referred to above as Spener's problem (1996b, vol. 6, p. 53). There are also, he thinks, *translations* of the doctrines of atonement, justification, and sanctification available for use by Reason.

First, atonement. Under our initial bondage of the will, Kant says, we enter into all sorts of bad habits which remain with us even after the revolution of the will which takes us under the good maxim. Kant calls the person before this revolution, "the old man," and the person afterwards, "the new man," following Paul's language in his epistles (e.g., Ephesians 4:24, Colossians 3:10). Kant distinguishes between revolution and reform. Revolution is a change of heart, the reversal of the basic ground of all our maxims, and it is seen only by God. What we experience is the slow process of reform. The new man, Kant says, is punished on behalf of the old man, and this allows God to reward the sinner justly with eternal life (1996b, vol. 6, p. 73). This is Kant's translation of the view which sees the atonement in terms of penal substitution, where Christ takes on himself as our substitute the just punishment for our sins. Christ's vicarious punishment cannot be used in its historical version by Reason because Reason does not take cognizance of the historical particularities of Golgotha, and also because (Kant thinks) guilt is not a liability that can be transmitted (like a financial debt) from one person to another. In Kant's translation, Christ is the new man. He undergoes punishment because of the pain involved in remorse and self-discipline and reparation for the failures of the old man, which occurred before the revolution of the will.

Atonement, on this translation, presupposes that the revolution of the will has taken place. Kant is therefore assuming the logical priority of justification, which in Lutheran theology is God's work of counting us just. Kant translates this doctrine by saying that after the birth of the new man, the heart as it is seen by God is "essentially well-pleasing to God," even though all we can ever experience is gradual improvement, infinitely extended. Kant is not saying here that our experience, and the temporal sequence by which it is informed, are illusory. He is saying, rather, that God, whose intuition is not limited by the temporal sequence, can see the stable disposition of the heart. God judges us as a completed whole "through a purely intellectual intuition" (1996b, vol. 6, p. 67; see also Chapter 28, Omniscience, and Chapter 32, Eternity). Intellectual intuition, in Kant's doctrine, is productive or constitutive; when God sees us as "essentially well-pleasing," God makes us so. As the Lutheran *Formula of Concord* puts it (III.2), God "bestows and imputes to us the righteousness of the obedience of Christ; for the sake of that righteousness we are received by God into favor and accounted righteous." When God looks at us, God sees Christ, because God is imputing to us Christ's righteousness. This doctrine would not be usable by Reason if we did not translate God the Son as humanity in its moral perfection, and God the Father as the Idea of holiness. With these translations, we are no longer using "God" as a term with singular reference. The doctrine becomes a way of saying that a human being comes to have a morally good disposition when the Idea of holiness picks out her or his disposition as instantiating humanity as it ought to be.

The work of God the Spirit is translated for use by Reason in terms of sanctification, or the gradual discipline of reform which leads to a greater conformity of a person's life

(both internal and external) to the demands of the moral law. The difficulty that motivates Kant here is that perseverance in the life of duty requires some assurance of “the reality and constancy of a disposition which ever progresses in goodness” (1996b, vol. 6, p. 67). He thinks of this good disposition as a “good spirit” controlling us. But this disposition is not something that Kant thinks I can see directly since I do not have God’s ability to see things as they are in themselves. I do have access to it, however, indirectly, by observing my actions (which are, Kant says, its appearances). I can see, if indeed my life is under the good maxim, a fundamental improvement in my way of life, judged by moral standards.

### Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard reflects on these translated versions of atonement, justification, and sanctification in the two letters of Judge William, who represents the ethical life in the pseudonymous work *Either/Or*, volume 2. Judge William represents an amalgam of Kant and Hegel, and gives us a vivid picture of how the ethical life and the transition into it from the aesthetic life feel from the inside. In the judge’s description of this transition, the self or spirit becomes conscious of itself in the despair caused by the inability of the aesthete to keep his (*sic*) own life interesting. In choosing this despair, he becomes conscious of his freedom and is enabled to return to the particular engagements of his life by choosing them in the light of this freedom. It is appropriate to think of this transition in terms of atonement because what is required is the suffering of the new man on behalf of the old, a suffering which the judge calls “repentance.” “I repent myself out of the whole of existence,” he says. “Repentance specifically expresses that evil essentially belongs to me and at the same time expresses that it does not essentially belong to me” (1987, vol. 2, p. 224). In what sense does evil essentially belong to me? The judge’s point is that in choosing myself as guilty, as having failed, I collect together all my previous “choices” out of their dispersion within the aesthetic life and accept responsibility for them all; I recognize that none of them were choices for myself as a whole or for myself as free. In what sense does evil not essentially belong to me? Those previous “choices” represent a failure of which I am no longer guilty in my new nature, though I take on responsibility for them from my past nature. If I do take on responsibility for them, in repentance, I am (the judge says) ransoming myself in order to remain in my freedom (1987, vol. 2, p. 232). The structure of repentance, as the judge describes it, is recapitulated (as is much in Kierkegaard) in Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (1962, especially pp. 325–48) under the heading of the call of conscience; but there is not space in this chapter to describe Heidegger’s appropriation of the idea (see Chapter 18, Phenomenology and Existentialism).

The language of justification comes in when the judge discusses the problem of the exception, the man who cannot live the ethical life. The judge recognizes himself in this discussion, and tries to use the language of Christian doctrine to get out of the difficulty. Here Kierkegaard is relating his own experience, “I had my thorn in my flesh, and so I did not marry and could take no position. ... I could have gotten anything I wanted, but in its place I became the exception” (1967, 7 (1): A 126, 5913). The ethical life is the position of the “universally human,” which requires, the judge says, marrying and



working for a living. Kierkegaard discovered himself to be an “exception,” a man who has placed himself outside the universal. Even if the judge is wrong about what the ethical life requires, he is right, according to the structure of the moral gap described at the beginning of this chapter, in thinking that the moral demand is unreachable by our own devices. The judge tries the desperate expedient, as the aesthete does in volume 1 of *Either/Or*, of thinking that his own suffering can be the occasion for his being justified. “[The exception] will perhaps experience at some time the joy that what caused him pain and made him inferior in his own eyes proves to be an occasion for his being raised up again and in a nobler sense becoming an extraordinary human being” (1987, vol. 2, p. 331).

### Alternative Solutions to the Problem of the Gap

There is something unsatisfactory about both the judge’s account and Kant’s translation of the doctrines for use by Reason. Kierkegaard allows us to see this by writing pseudonymously, so that we can see how a life lived on the basis of such an account falls apart even in its own terms. The objection is also expressed externally at the very end of *Either/Or*, in the words of a sermon by a pastor who is a friend of the judge. The emphasis of this sermon is that whatever we do, we are in the wrong in relation to God. We can put the point in terms of a dilemma. Either we should reject the notion of extra-human assistance or we should retain it. If we reject it, we are left with the problem of the moral gap. If we retain extra-human assistance, we have additional resources to show the possibility of the revolution of the will. But now we cannot stay within the constraints of what Reason can use (at least as Kant understands them).

In general there is a problem for anyone who accepts the existence of a moral gap, as described above, but wants to deny the possibility of divine assistance. Roughly, there are three strategies for overcoming the gap other than the religious. The first is to keep the demand as high as it is in Kant, and then exaggerate our capacities so that they are adequate to the demand. Utilitarianism, though it does not need to be optimistic in this way, has from its beginning exaggerated the powers of education and “opinion” to make us fit for the moral demand, as though what was holding us back was ignorance rather than corruption of the will. One place to see this is John Stuart Mill’s *Utilitarianism* (1962, p. 269), which expresses the hope “that education and opinion, which have so vast a power over human character, should so use that power as to establish in the mind of every individual an indissoluble association between his own happiness and the good of the whole.” The second strategy is to recognize that our natural capacities are not adequate to such a demand, and to modify the demand downward so as to fit the capacities. One place to see this is Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*: “I am not obliged to care for starving children in Africa, because there is no way for this caring to be completed in the other unless I abandon the caring to which I am obligated” (1984, p. 86). Noddings holds that we also have to be ready to care even for people we do not yet know. But if morality is reduced to caring, though it will still be very demanding, the demand will be reduced. Another example of a reduction of the Kantian demand is Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (1985). The third strategy is to admit the gap and posit some

non-theological or naturalistic mechanism for bridging it. Perhaps history moves by a Hegelian but non-theistic progress of the spirit through cultural and societal transformation. One example of such a theory is Marx's view, in *Capital* (1906–9), that our capacities will be transformed if the proletariat comes to own the means of production.

I have given examples of each of the three alternative strategies, but the strategies are pervasive, and many more examples could be given. If we do not have the expectation that any such strategy can bridge the moral gap, we will be left with the initial problem that Kant calls Spener's problem, and we will either have to accept the religious answer or live in the incoherence of an unrealizable demand.

### The Traditional Doctrines

There are different ideas within the Christian tradition about how atonement works. The term means originally, in English, "at-one-ment" or reconciliation. It occurs in scripture in the account of the animal sacrifices prescribed in the first seven chapters of Leviticus, where "the priest will make atonement for the man's sin, and he will be forgiven" (Leviticus 4:26; see Hare 2010). I will mention four of the main alternative ideas and attach names to them (though the views of these authors about the atonement are complex, combining some of the ideas which follow). One idea, suggested by Augustine and many of the early fathers, is that Christ was paying ransom to the forces of evil; our lives were owed to Satan, because of our sin, and Christ's death was the price paid to Satan to secure our release. Another idea, to be found in Anselm, is that Christ's death is compensation or satisfaction paid to God the Father instead of the punishment which properly belongs to sinners; by sinning we fail to give God what is due, and so dishonor God, and God's justice requires that this deficit be made good. A third idea, found in Abelard, is that Christ's death is the consequence of his life of perfect obedience, and that this life and death together have the power to transform us as a model or example of what human life should be. A fourth idea, found in Aquinas (1981), is that God's absolute power allows satisfaction for sin in some other way, but Christ's Incarnation and passion are an especially appropriate or fitting means for a variety of reasons, among which is the manifestation of God the Father's and Christ's charity; Christ's passion is a true sacrifice, the instrumental cause of satisfaction, offering God an act of love which exceeds the offensiveness of human sin, and we share in the merits of this love through union with Christ as members of his body. Luther emphasized, in addition to the transfer of Christ's life to us, the transfer of our sin to Christ, who "was made sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21). The Bible contains a rich variety of images to interpret Christ's death, including centrally the notion that he freely became a sacrifice for us and that we are identified with him in his death and resurrection. It is not necessary to accept only one of these ideas of atonement and reject the others, for they all have roots in biblical language, and any theology of the atonement which wants to be faithful to this language has to reflect this variety. Colin Gunton, in *The Actuality of Atonement* (1989), discusses this point well.

Justification is the act by which God declares us just or righteous, and so "well-pleasing." Again there are many alternative ideas within Christianity about how to

understand this doctrine. One large question is whether the justification is external and “forensic,” and Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us without any internal change in us; or whether the declaration of our righteousness recognizes a change in our inner condition, by which Christ’s righteousness is imparted to us and not merely imputed. Roman Catholic and Protestant views of justification, which diverged at the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, have tended to converge; on both accounts it is God’s initiative and not ours that justifies us.

Different from both justification (if it is seen as external) and regeneration (the birth of the new life within us, if this is seen as happening all at once), will be the gradual process of reform by which our lives become more pleasing to God. There are large theological differences internal to Christianity about the question of what sort of cooperation there is, if any, between us and God in these various aspects of our salvation, and about the extent of the change in our nature (whether, for example, we become ourselves partakers of the divine nature, as at 2 Peter 5:4). Finally, there are long-standing disputes about the scope of God’s work; whether all human beings, for example, are encompassed in the scope of the atonement, or only those pre-elected by God for such benefit.

These differences in doctrine should all be seen, however, within the constant frame of the structure with which I started this article, the structure of the moral gap. There are important and interesting philosophical issues that reside in the differences, issues for example about divine and human freedom and about the relation between action and character. But the overall significance for a moral philosopher of the doctrines about God’s work in our salvation lies in the solution they offer to the problem of the moral gap.

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## Resurrection, Heaven, and Hell

JONATHAN L. KVANVIG

Philosophical reflection concerning the afterlife has focused on the place of such doctrines in the great monotheistic religions of the Abrahamic tradition – Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. The philosophical issues that arise concerning these doctrines are not limited to such traditions, however. Consider, for example, the doctrine of hell. Any religion promises certain benefits to its adherents, and these benefits require some contrast that befalls, or might befall, those who fail to adhere to the religion in question. This contrast to the benefits the religion proffers will raise many, if not all, the same philosophical concerns as are raised by the vivid imagery that has come to be associated with the doctrine of hell in Western culture. Here the focus will be on the philosophical issues arising out of such doctrines in the great monotheistic traditions, and especially within Christianity. The first point to recognize, however, is that such narrowing still preserves in microcosm the general philosophical contours any religion will encounter when it advocates certain patterns of life and rejects others.

In the history of thought about the afterlife, several problems have been prominent. The first and most obvious problem is about the concept of the afterlife itself and the doctrine of the resurrection of the body that is found in all the religions of the Abrahamic tradition. According to this doctrine, each human person will be resurrected in bodily form to life eternal either in heaven or in hell. This doctrine raises two types of philosophical concern, one concerning the motivation for the doctrine and the other concerning the possibility of its truth.

The concern about its possible truth centers on the status of individuals and their bodies between the time of death and the time of resurrection. Though there are somewhat far-fetched possibilities to explain how the same person and the same body persists through time from the moment of death to the moment of resurrection (see van Inwagen 1978), the more natural accounts will require gappy existence of some sort here, so that either the individual or the individual's body will pass out of existence for a time (Merricks 2001). The notion of gappy existence raises problems of its own, however, since identity through time is commonly thought to require spatiotemporal continuity. Of course, appealing to this requirement to argue against the possibility of gappy existence would be too question-begging to have much rhetorical force, but the objection can be pursued in a less problematic way by pointing out the explanatory

work done by the continuity requirement and asking for something similar for gappy existence. Spatiotemporal continuity provides a ground for the identity of an object across time, and thus functions as a truthmaker of some sort for the idea that an object in 2009 is numerically the same object as one in 1960 (in spite of vast qualitative differences between the two objects). If, however, there is no spatiotemporal continuity to ground such an identity, as would be the case for gappy existence, what could possibly account for strict numerical identity across the temporal gap? It is this question that is behind the ease with which fear of transporter machines can be induced in students. When an individual steps into a transporter machine in a *Star Trek* episode, and an indistinguishable individual appears a few moments later on the surface of the planet being orbited in the episode, what makes the individual on the surface of the planet anything more than a mere molecule-for-molecule replica of the individual who stepped into the transporter machine? If persons are immaterial souls that can be attached at different space-time points to different bodies, that is one thing. But what about the physical body itself? What makes it the same body across the temporal gap? This question is important because the doctrine of the resurrection does not simply claim that we will be raised to life in some body or other, but rather that it will be our own body that is resurrected.

One might reply that there is no real need for a resurrection of the numerically identical body, but only a resurrection of each of us that embodies each of us in the same type of body, subject to whatever changes are required for the body to count as a glorified body. For those who would insist on numerical identity, the common strategy when dealing with requests for grounds or truthmakers is to question any supposed requirement that the possibility in question requires anything like a ground or a truthmaker. Perhaps such a ground is necessary for us to understand how something is possible, even if it is not necessary for the possibility itself.

Such defensive maneuvers are required primarily because the doctrine of the resurrection is not simply a doctrine of an afterlife. For the latter, a defense of dualism could answer concerns about the possibility in question (see Swinburne 1997), but as noted above, viewing persons as essentially immaterial entities provides no motivation for the doctrine of the resurrection. To address this question of motivation, versions of Christian materialism about human persons have arisen in recent decades (see Corcoran 2006; Hudson 2001; Merricks 2001; van Inwagen 1978), arguing that the doctrine of the resurrection is best understood as requiring a conception of persons as essentially material or physical. On such a view, whether or not extended to the view that human persons are identical with their bodies, the motivation for the doctrine of the resurrection is clear and direct, since there would be no possibility of life after death without a doctrine of the resurrection. If we think of human beings in more Platonic terms, involving a body that bears roughly the same relation to a person as clothes do to our bodies, the doctrine of the resurrection becomes much harder to understand. Hence, there is strong motivation in the doctrine of the resurrection to reject such Platonic conceptions of a human person in favor of more physicalist conceptions, perhaps to the point of identifying a human person with his or her body. Such views are not free from other problems, however, difficulties concerning afterlife existence between the time of death and the time of resurrection as well as specifically Christian concerns about the doctrine of the Incarnation, which requires a conception of the second person of the



Trinity existing at one time without a human body and at another time in human form (see Plantinga 1999; and Merricks 2007).

Regardless of how these issues are resolved, those resurrected are subject to one of two fates, and each fate comes with its own philosophical concerns. In Christianity, the doctrines of heaven and hell are associated with different, and sometimes competing, contrasts: contrasts such as reward/punishment, mercy/justice, and grace/desert. Regarding the doctrine of hell, for example, the philosophical problems raised arise directly out of what we might call the punishment model of hell. On this model, the primary purpose of hell is to punish those whose earthly lives and behavior warrant it. Given such a model for understanding hell, one might expect that the dominant model for understanding heaven would be in terms of reward, but such is not the case. Heaven is usually understood as fundamentally a display of God's mercy or grace, and though the concept of it being a reward for faithfulness to God is not absent entirely, the dimension of reward is typically not treated as capturing the fundamental purpose of heaven.

Regarding hell, the fundamental issue has always been whether consignment to hell could be fair or just. This problem arises in the context of the punishment model of hell, which involves four separable theses (see Kvanvig 1993):

- (1) The Punishment Thesis: the purpose of hell is to punish those whose earthly lives and behavior warrant it;
- (2) The No Escape Thesis: it is metaphysically impossible to get out of hell once one has been consigned there;
- (3) The Anti-Universalism Thesis: some people will be consigned to hell; and
- (4) The Eternal Existence Thesis: hell is a place of conscious existence.

The traditional doctrine of hell in Christianity is just this particular elaboration of the punishment model; this doctrine, or a minor modification of it, is the dominant view in the history of Christianity. The minor modification arises from the doctrine known as the harrowing of hell, according to which between the time of Jesus' death and resurrection, he preached to the inhabitants of hell, some of whom accepted his message and thereby went to heaven. Those who accept such a doctrine deny the No Escape Thesis, for they believe that some have escaped from hell after being consigned there. Nonetheless, they also believe that the harrowing of hell was a unique and unrepeatable event. That is, they believe that it is not possible for anyone, anymore to escape from hell once consigned there. This modified No Escape Thesis yields a minor modification of the traditional doctrine, but one with no eschatological implications for anyone considering the truth of Christianity. For such consideration only occurs after the Christian message is in place, and at that point, it has become impossible to escape from hell.

Throughout the history of Christianity, however, many have denied both the traditional doctrine and the minor modification just discussed, amending it in various ways. Annihilationism in its usual form, or the related position called conditional immortality, adopts the punishment model and clarifies it with theses (1)–(3), denying the Eternal Existence Thesis (see Cullman 1964). Instead, these views understand hell in terms of a reference to non-existence: the punishment of hell is simply that of not existing anymore, forever. Second chance theories accept all of the above except the No

Escape Thesis, preferring instead a view of hell on which it is possible to leave hell and enter heaven. Universalists deny only the claim that some people will be consigned to hell, insisting that a God of love either could not or would not allow anyone to suffer the disaster of hell (see Talbott 1990). Alternatively, worries about the justice of hell can lead to a denial that heaven and hell are exclusive and exhaustive of afterlife possibilities. For example, the doctrine of limbo is best viewed as an attempt to eliminate the perceived injustice of consigning to hell children who die before the age of accountability and adults who die never having heard the Christian message.

Each of these views accepts the same underlying core picture of what hell is like, what I have termed the punishment model of hell. One of the strongest arguments for this claim is the fact that there is no standard alternative to the traditional doctrine of hell in the history of Christian thought that accepts theses (2)–(4) above and denies the Punishment Thesis. This fact strongly suggests that in the history of Christian thought, the fundamental understanding of hell is in terms of punishment, with other features of hell less central and more easily surrendered in the face of perceived difficulties. Even though recent times have seen the crumbling of the punishment model's bulwark, it is nonetheless the dominant conception of hell in Christian thought.

The beginnings of the crumbling can be seen by examining the common assumption that these alternatives to the traditional doctrine share, for each of these positions is viewed as offering a *mitigation* of the perceived severity of the traditional doctrine (see Walker 1964). Each is offered to assuage concern that the traditional doctrine is simply unjust, or perhaps, unbecoming to a loving God. Yet, it is simply false that the alternatives to the traditional doctrine somehow escape the philosophical difficulties perceived in the traditional doctrine. Annihilationism, for example, views the cessation of existence as somehow preferable to unending conscious existence in hell. Our ordinary conceptions of punishment, however, view capital punishment as far more severe than life imprisonment. Annihilationism can only be viewed as a mitigation of the traditional doctrine when the traditional doctrine is confused with the literary pictures of hell in Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus and in Dante's descriptions of hell. These literary vehicles make a considerable impression on the psyche of those who hear them, and are thereby superior communicative devices in one respect to the philosophical treatise. The danger, however, is to confuse the packaging with the doctrine itself, which must occur in order to confusedly think of annihilationism as a mitigation of the traditional doctrine. For there is nothing in the traditional doctrine that requires torture with fire and brimstone of those in hell. Such language, as well as the contrasting language of outer darkness, must be treated as the metaphorical language it is. And when it is, its literal significance is that hell is as bad a situation to find oneself in as anything can be (consistent, of course, with the moral perfection of God). When understood as such, it is clear that annihilationism makes no advance over the traditional doctrine on the issue of the justice of hell; if anything, it appears to raise greater concern about the justice of hell inasmuch as eternal death appears to be a worse fate than eternal life in hell.

Similarly, universalism does not clearly solve the problem of the perceived injustice of hell. Some universalists think that if only God would secure the presence of everyone in heaven, that would solve the problem, but it does not (at least not for traditional theists). For the traditional understanding of God attributes to him necessary existence

and essential perfect goodness (see Chapter 30, Goodness; and Chapter 33, Necessity). So if it is a merely contingent fact that all are saved and thus avoid hell, this universalist position only modally masks the underlying problem of the perceived injustice of hell (see Kvanvig 1993). For if it is true in every metaphysically possible world that God exists and is perfectly good and that sending a person to hell is unjust, then there cannot be any metaphysically possible world in which anyone goes to hell. That is, it simply cannot be a merely contingent truth that all are saved; it must instead be a necessary truth. If so, however, presence or absence in heaven or hell is at odds with an explanation of an afterlife fate that involves something to do with libertarian free will. If universalism is a necessary truth, then no matter what a person chooses, she simply could not choose complete rebellion against God. Such a price for avoiding the problem of hell is high, indeed, for it compromises the appeal to free will in attempting to address the problem of evil (see Chapter 58, The Logical Problem of Evil; and Chapter 59, The Evidential Problem of Evil).

Second chance views fare no better. Some views that go by that name are not alterations of the traditional doctrine of hell at all, but merely insist that because of the severity of hell, persons deserve a second chance to avoid it after death (so that they never were first consigned to hell and then escaped, but rather were given an additional opportunity to avoid such consignment altogether). Yet, if such a second chance is deserved, so would be a third chance, launching an infinite sequence of delays of consignment to hell. (Note that it would raise further issues [of fairness or lack of complete love] if the second chance were justified solely because some first chances were not equal or optimal chances; so later chances will have to be justified simply on the grounds that earlier chances were refused.) Since an infinitely delayed punishment is no punishment at all, such views are committed to denying the justice of hell altogether. A more appropriate response for such second chance views would be to offer an acceptable account of hell, or simply deny the existence of it altogether, rather than pretend to a mitigation of hell by some escape route.

Other second chance views claim that consignment to hell cannot be postponed, but that escape from it is not impossible; all that is needed to get out is the same change of heart, mind, and will required in one's earthly life to be "fit for heaven." Such views fail to be truly eschatological accounts of heaven and hell. Eschatology is the doctrine of the last things, and one feature of this idea of culmination or consummation is that there is a finality to it. In Christian thought, this idea is expressed vividly in the idea of a final judgment, and any conception of the afterlife that treats residence in heaven and hell in the geographic way in which we think of residence in, say, Texas or California, simply does not fall into the category of an eschatological doctrine at all. If heaven and hell are conceived of as mere extensions of an earthly life, where people can pack up and move at will, such a conception has not yet satisfied the eschatological constraints on an appropriate account of heaven and hell.

Much the same should be said, I believe, regarding the doctrine of limbo. Heaven and hell should be viewed as the exclusive and exhaustive eschatological options, because to be in heaven is just to be with God and to be in hell is just to fail to be with God. The doctrine of limbo arises directly from the perceived injustice of the traditional doctrine of hell (and some further claims about what avoiding hell requires). If so,

however, it is better to address the defects of one's conception of hell than to introduce new metaphysical dimensions to the afterlife.

The fundamental problem of the justice of hell, on the traditional conception, is that people receive an infinite punishment for less than infinite sin. One standard reply to such a complaint is that it matters not only what the character of your sin is, but also who the sin is against in determining appropriate punishment (see Adams 1975). Such a response, however, presumes some way of ranking individuals so that sinning against beings higher on the scale is more wrong than sinning against beings lower on the scale. Furthermore, this ranking will have to yield the result that sinning against God deserves infinite punishment whereas no other sin does. This position is difficult to maintain. Even if it is granted that sin against God is infinitely bad, punishment deserved is not directly correlated with the seriousness of wrong done. Causing the death of a person is one of the worst things one can do to a human being, but some ways of doing something so seriously bad do not deserve any punishment at all (accidental killings, for example, or perhaps killing in a just war). Punishment deserved must be a function both of seriousness of wrong done, and some information about the intentions of the person doing the wrong. Furthermore, the latter information can sometimes yield the result that little or no punishment is deserved at all, even though the action performed seriously wrongs someone.

This problem leads to a number of positions on the nature of hell that deny the punishment model. Hell is conceived on this alternative model in terms of something a person chooses (see Lewis 1973; Swinburne 1983; Stump 1986; Kvanvig 1993; Walls 1992). Hell may be a place where some people are punished, but the fundamental purpose of hell is not to punish people, but to honor their choices. There is a variety of conceptions of hell falling within this alternative model, and many of the same issues that face the traditional model arise here as well. For example, if hell is what a person chooses, what exactly is the content of the choice? My own view is that the content of the choice is either to be with God and all that requires, or to reject that option. If so, the issue of annihilation is a central issue for the choice model, for there is no possibility of existing without dependence on God. Furthermore, God's perfect goodness constrains him to aim for our perfection always; so choosing to be independent of God, when fully informed, would be logically equivalent to choosing annihilation.

This discussion of the doctrine of hell reveals how Christian thought on the doctrine has centered on the question of the justice of hell. Reflection on the doctrine of heaven, however, has not focused as much on issues of fairness or justice. Instead, the primary concerns about heaven have centered around issues such as whether true happiness or blessedness is possible for those in heaven (perhaps one's memories never fade sufficiently to allow perfect blessedness, or perhaps the suffering of the damned in hell prevents such bliss), why faith or belief in God is a prerequisite for presence in heaven, and whether it is possible to leave heaven once one is there (see Walls 2002). There are, however, two indications of concern about the justice of heaven in Christian thought. The first is reflected in the central position of the doctrine of justification in Christian theology. This doctrine presents in summary form the entire point of the Christian faith: that through the saving work of Jesus, the broken relationship between God and humans is restored, with the result that those redeemed by God in this way

come to share his presence in heaven (see Chapter 73, Atonement, Justification, and Sanctification). The philosophical task of the doctrine traces to St Paul's argument of the first chapters of Romans that God is both just and a justifier of sinners; that there is no logical conflict inherent in this conjunction, in spite of the fact that a classic example in the Hebrew Bible of an unjust judge is one who lets the guilty go free. The doctrine of justification, that is, undertakes to show that there is no contradiction between the claims that God is perfectly righteous, just, and holy, that human beings are sinners, and that God justifies such human beings. Without an adequate doctrine of justification, Christianity could no longer view heaven as primarily the culmination of God's gracious response to the human condition. Instead of having a doctrine of heaven centering on the concept of grace, one could at most have a concept of heaven focusing on the concept of reward: heaven would be a reward for those sufficiently responsible in their lives and behavior to God's requirements.

The second aspect of the history of Christian reflection about heaven that signals a concern for the justice or fairness of it is the doctrine of purgatory and the correlative partitioning of heaven so that differential rewards are given to different individuals. The doctrine of purgatory holds a special place in this regard, however, for it is one thing to think that some individuals deserve a greater reward than others, and it is quite another thing to think that some individuals must undergo the inconvenience of purgatory in compensation for failures of the past or for the purpose of character development in preparation for the more blessed experience of (other regions of) heaven. Whereas the point of the doctrine of justification is to relieve Christianity of the charge that its understanding of heaven threatens the righteousness of God, the point of the doctrine of purgatory can be taken to rebut the claim that God bestows his grace in a profligate manner. There is both the sense of unfairness involved in granting the same heavenly experience to those redeemed only at the last moment "between the saddle and the soil" and those whose youthful redemption is followed by lifelong service and faithfulness to God, and a sense of incoherence in maintaining that true blessedness can be experienced by those whose lives and character are still bent and twisted by sin. True blessedness comes only when one's desires for the good are satisfied, and for those who desire otherwise, such is simply impossible.

Given human nature, it is not surprising that the issues of justice that arise regarding the doctrine of hell have received much more attention than those surrounding the doctrine of heaven. Most of us are much more comfortable getting benefits we do not deserve or gifts that are inappropriate than we are shouldering burdens that are not ours or suffering pain we do not deserve. The fundamental point to notice here, however, is that the doctrines of heaven and hell are not separable in this way. They are intimately linked, and the account one accepts of one constrains the kind of account one can develop of the other. These points may seem obvious to some, but they have been ignored regularly, especially in discussion of the nature of hell. If we think of hell as a place of punishment, the logical contrast would seem to indicate that heaven is a place of reward. Yet, the Christian conception denies that heaven is fundamentally a reward for faithful service; it is, rather, the free and gracious gift of a loving God, unmerited by anything we have done. Another way to put this tension is to note that explanations of presence in heaven and presence in hell seem to have little in common. On the usual position, presence in heaven is explained in terms of God's love, not his justice or

fairness, whereas presence in hell is explained in terms of his justice rather than his love. Such explanations are at best incomplete, for love and justice often pull us in different directions regarding how to treat people. Some ways of treating people are just, but unloving; and some ways are caring, but less than fully just. At the very least, some explanation is required concerning the interaction of the motives God has in establishing heaven and hell.

More can be said, however. In the Christian view, God's fundamental motive must be conceived of in terms of love rather than justice. Justice has no hope of explaining the two great actions of God, creation and redemption; only love or beneficence can account for them. If so, however, one's account of hell ought to accord with this hierarchical conception of God's motivational structure as well. In particular, it will not do to portray God as fundamentally loving until we reach the point of discussing the nature of hell, and suddenly portray God as fundamentally a just God.

The most straightforward way to give a unified account of heaven and hell is to portray each as flowing from one and the same divine motivational structure. Whereas the punishment model of hell has difficulty proceeding in this way, the choice model seems much better suited to such an account. For if hell is constructed to honor the choices that free individuals might make, it is not hard to see how a fundamentally loving God could construct it in this way. For in truly loving another, we often must risk losing the other, and part of loving completely is a willingness to lose the other completely as well. Such a unified conception of heaven and hell, where both are grounded in and explained in terms of God's love, comports well with Dante's conception of hell: hell was built by divine power, by the highest wisdom, and by primordial love (Stump 1986).

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## Reincarnation and Karma

PAUL REASONER

“So can you tell me where you will go when you leave this world?”

(*Brhadaranyaka Upanisad*, 4.2.1)

Belief in reincarnation is historically and culturally widespread. Belief in karma also surfaces in a wide range of times and places. While karma and reincarnation are often automatically associated with each other, belief in reincarnation is not always accompanied by belief in karma, and they are separable conceptually. Reincarnation belief appears to be broader in scope than belief in karma, with various versions of it appearing in ancient civilizations in India, Africa, Greece, and the Americas (see Obeyesekere 2002). Gananath Obeyesekere speaks of the “ethicization” of reincarnation as a condition for the development of a doctrine of karma in his anthropological thought experiment in *Imagining Karma*. Specifically, ethicization refers to “the processes whereby a morally right or wrong action becomes a religiously right or wrong action that in turn affects a person’s destiny after death” (p. 75). While notions of reincarnation and karma are present in various times and places, this discussion will focus on the religious and philosophical positions usually associated with Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist perspectives (see Chapter 1, Hinduism; and Chapter 2, Buddhism).

To limit the scope to Indian thought and its offshoots does not mean that one consistent theory of reincarnation and/or karma can be articulated, even within a single religious/philosophical tradition. If standard religious texts, both long-standing and contemporary religious practices, and philosophical writings on reincarnation and karma are all considered, understanding of a complete and consistent system seems continually out of reach. Just when the shape of the web of reincarnation and karma seems to be coming into focus (when considering one tradition), another text or lived practice is remembered and the shape shifts again. In fact, in an article with the same title, Karl Potter (2001) asks the question “How many karma theories are there?” He goes on to suggest that given the formal permutations possible from the various factors that constitute karma theories, an almost infinite number of theories of karma are conceivable. Similarly, in the case of reincarnation, to offer three sample variables, theories might differ due to (1) the length of time between death and subsequent reincarnation, (2) the nature of the entity that is purported to be reincarnated (e.g., an indivisible soul of a recently deceased person [often limited to direct relatives], a life

force, or, as in the case of Buddhism, the denial of an entity which is reincarnated and yet the assertion of rebirth), and (3) the range of forms of reincarnations (e.g., human only, or humans and other sentient species, including gods, or all living things whether sentient or not).

Therefore, rather than attempting to articulate a consistent account of reincarnation (and rebirth) and karma, this chapter will sketch aspects of several accounts to give some sense of the philosophical issues involved.

## Reincarnation/Rebirth

Reincarnation asserts that human persons after death (the end of one embodiment or incarnation) are then embodied or re-incarnated in another body. This way of putting the matter implies that there is some entity that is re-incarnated, something that carries over from life to life (whether or not that something is identified as the same person). While this chapter draws primarily from Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist accounts, in its most basic form (simply emphasizing re-embodiment), reincarnation is compatible with Christianity. Indeed, core Christian doctrines emphasize the resurrection of the body or the receiving of a heavenly body (see Chapter 74, Resurrection, Heaven, and Hell; and Chapter 65, Theism and the Scientific Understanding of the Mind). However, in a form not affirmed by Christians (Origen being a notable exception), reincarnation most often includes the notion that this cycle of birth and death both has gone on for a long time in the past and will go on for a long time in the future (even if it includes some additional notion that it might be most preferable to completely escape this cycle).

The Buddhist position on reincarnation rejects an enduring entity that reincarnates, an idea that would be contradictory to the Buddha's teaching of *anatman* or no-self. No entity or stand-alone soul is embodied in successive lifetimes. This is still a variant of other reincarnation theories in the sense that successive lives of a person are joined together in an unbroken string, but it is also a radical variant since a permanent entity that crosses from one life to the next is denied. Rather, the person is accounted for entirely by reference to the five aggregates (*skandhas*): "material body, feelings, perception, predispositions, and consciousness" (McDermott, in O'Flaherty 1980, p. 165). In Buddhism it is the causal flow that continues on, with mental and karmic elements moving from one set of associated physical elements at the end of one life to a new set of physical elements to start the next lifetime. Hence, the preferred term in Buddhism is *rebirth* to avoid the implication of a continuing essence in reincarnation (see McDermott, "Karma and Rebirth in Early Buddhism," in O'Flaherty 1980, for a standard account of a person and rebirth in early Buddhism).

What does a reincarnation/rebirth theory explain? Reincarnation is used to account for striking similarities between a deceased person and a living person. Reincarnation is also used as an explanation for a remarkable skill or unusual knowledge or peculiar interest shown by a living, often young, person; this person is taken to be a reincarnation of some previously living person who possessed that skill, knowledge, or interest. In addition, what appear to be striking coincidences (e.g., birthmarks on newborns which are positioned exactly where mortal wounds were inflicted on a person) are also explained by reincarnation. Reincarnation theory accommodates the intuition that

there is more to a person than just the physical body and that persons are too valuable to be annihilated at death – reincarnation asserts that some core of the person continues on. When karma is linked to reincarnation/rebirth, an explanation of certain events in life is possible while still holding to some objective sense of justice.

Reincarnation/rebirth theories raise questions in at least three areas: the conditions for personal identity, the role of memory across reincarnations/rebirths, and the possibility of empirical evidence for reincarnations/rebirths. In passing, it should be noted that many of the issues in establishing criteria (physical, psychological, memory) for personal identity in reincarnation/rebirth scenarios are also present in philosophical arguments about personal identity within a single life (see Parfit 1984 for some of these arguments).

One puzzle about reincarnation theory is how to identify the entity that reincarnates. What counts in favor of one account over another? And what are the identity conditions for the reincarnation sequence? Is memory the appropriate condition for personal identity? Should something weaker than memory proper (e.g., latent memories) be enough for an identity claim? Some aspects of these identity puzzles are captured in a well-known Buddhist exchange on the question of identity relations between person A and subsequent person B (in the same causal continuum):

The King said: “He who is born, Nagasena, does he remain the same or become another?”  
 “Neither the same nor another.” (*The Questions of King Milinda*, part 1 [II.2.1], p. 63)

Memory (internal corroboration) or some empirical connection between lifetimes (external corroboration) is often cited in support of identifying one life as a reincarnation of another.

Since no observations can be made of the actual entity as it moves from death to reincarnation, the claim is that observables make plausible that which is unobservable. Hence, in terms of assessment, the empirical evidence needs to be consistent with and explained by the offered reincarnation or rebirth theory, but it will not prove that alternative theories are mistaken.

Techniques to enhance retrocognition are found in a variety of traditions which affirm reincarnation (the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patanjali offer one set of such techniques). What exactly can memory show? While memories of past lives would seem to count in favor of the view that one had indeed lived those past lives, purported memories even within this life are not infallible. Under what conditions, if any, should memories be taken as a form of internal confirmation for some state of affairs? Memory retrieval techniques that are intended to span across previous lives are also supposed to have some additional benefit – insight into the human condition, avoidance of mistakes made in previous lives, and even the acquisition of knowledge which will be helpful when one again enters the liminal state between death and birth.

## Karma

Karma (Sanskrit, *kamma* [Pali]) means “action,” and in its earliest usage refers specifically to the actions of one who makes a sacrifice with the hope of gaining something

from the gods. This developed over time to refer to actions in the wider ethical realm and the effects of those actions. In response to a question about what happens after death, the *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* gives us one of the early statements about karma:

“What then happens to that person?” Yajnavalkya replied: “My friend, we cannot talk about this in public. Take my hand, Artabhaga; let’s go and discuss this in private.” So they left and talked about it. And what did they talk about?—they talked about nothing but action [karma]. And what did they praise?—they praised nothing but action. Yajnavalkya told him: “A man turns into something good by good action and into something bad by bad action.” Thereupon, Jaratkarava Artabhaga fell silent. (3.2.13, in *Upanisads*, p. 38)

A simple definition of karma might be that it is “a theory of rebirth based on the moral quality of previous lives” (O’Flaherty 1980, p. xi). Karma is often described as a causal, even inexorable law such that ethically significant actions (good or evil) have corresponding results (for good or evil) in this life or in a future life. Potter has characterized the common core of karma, the “classical karma theory of India” (CKTI), as follows:

[C]ertain fundamental features of one’s present life—vis., the genus, species, and class into which one has been born, the length of life one is (likely) to live, and the type of affective experiences one is having—are conditioned by one’s actions in a previous existence. (“Critical Response,” in Neufeldt 1986, p. 109)

Karma is used to explain cases where injustice in this life is visible – a good action results in a bad event and vice versa. It also explains injustice in this life in more fundamental ways, for example, the unfairness of the kind of life some are born into compared to others (e.g., the unfairness of being born with disease or diminished mental or physical capacities, or conversely, with unusually high intelligence or blazing beauty). Accompanying the initial kernel of ethically charged action and corresponding result are (1) the belief that a human person in some sense is re-embodied after death so that a human life is a series of births, deaths, and rebirths; (2) an ethically significant action in this life can somehow generate a causal chain which can reach fruition in an event one or more lifetimes away from the current life; (3) these resultant events are in the right proportions to the significance (value, potency) of the original action; (4) the causal connection and its proportionality are a given in the nature of the world, a natural (ethical) causal law, and are not subject to the workings of a particular deity who passes judgment. Karma appeals to the deeply human intuitions that somehow injustice must be righted, or that blame needs to be applied, or both.

In Buddhism, the concept of intention or volition (*cetana*) is a necessary component of actions that have karmic significance; since not all actions are volitional, not all actions have karmic effects. On the other hand, in Jainism, intention or volition is not a necessary component of karma, and therefore even actions that lack intentionality will yield karmic effects. Intentionality is not the only issue which produces opposing views within karma theories. Is karma strictly individual or does parental karma affect offspring? Are karmic results inexorable in reaching fruition, or can repentance mitigate or expiate those results? (See O’Flaherty 1980, p. xix, for a sample list of opposing themes within karma theories).

## Causality

Karmic causation can be considered one aspect of a universal law of causation (Reichenbach 1990, p. 2). As such, karma theory has metaphysical implications. Various accounts are given as to the nature of elements and the way in which they carry karmic effects forward (e.g., momentary physical bits [*dharmas*] in early Buddhism), the relationship of karmic effects to that which is the person (e.g., infinitesimal physical bits adhering to the soul [*jiva*] in Jainism), and the working out of how karmic effects can be carried along across reincarnations/rebirths and how they reach fruition at the appropriate time (e.g., Vasubandhu's account of seeds and store-consciousness in *Karmasiddhiprakarana*).

Reincarnation/rebirth theories differ as to the amount of time that exists between the death of one life and the beginning of the next life. If karmically charged causal elements can be thought of as connected to a particular physical entity, what happens when that physical entity dies? Do the karmic elements stay attached to an enduring self or soul? Is a special subtle (invisible) body responsible for transporting that which is karmically significant to the next reincarnation or rebirth? Or, if there is only a karmic/consciousness causal chain that floats free at death from the aspects of physical causation with which it was associated, how does that karmic/consciousness flow hold together, and how does it get reattached to a new physical entity (even if that entity is only considered to be a flow of momentary physical elements)? Does the disembodied consciousness have the possibility of choice in this state between death and birth? The various traditions offer widely divergent responses.

One further causal puzzle is that the requisite causal chains of all persons must somehow be in harmony; otherwise not everyone's karma could come to fruition. As Terence Penelhum notes, karma is more than an affirmation of some general sense of universal causation; the karmic view of causality includes the idea that the universal causal flow promotes justice for everyone (Penelhum, "Critical Response," in Neufeldt 1986, p. 340). It is not surprising that at times theistic oversight is included in some karmic theories.

## Problem of Evil

Karma has often been described as a retributive theory of justice which is complete. That is, karma is a way to account even for suffering and evil that is apparently undeserved; it is deserved because of one's action in a previous life or lives. Given the assumption that apparently undeserved suffering needs an explanation, this view of karma asserts that no philosophical problem of evil needs to be resolved since all evil is the fruition of previous actions and balance or justice is preserved (see Chapter 58, The Logical Problem of Evil; and Chapter 59, The Evidential Problem of Evil).

What of natural or gratuitous evils? If one dies in a volcanic eruption, what exactly does that have to do with some action taken a number of lifetimes ago? Is it plausible that a causal chain exists from the bad action in a previous lifetime to this particular volcanic eruption? Is it possible that not all suffering is linked to personal karmic effects?



If suffering is necessarily linked to one's own past karma, then some difficulties arise even in the case of the historical Buddha, since he is described as experiencing suffering (see Walters 1990 for a discussion of these cases). To be a Buddha (an enlightened one) is to have exhausted all karmic outflows. But if the Buddha suffered, was it due to some karmic effect reaching fruition from a past life? The response to this question in *The Questions of King Milinda* broadens the range of causes for suffering beyond individual karma:

"No, O king. It is not all suffering that has its root in Karma. There are eight causes by which sufferings arise, by which many beings suffer pain. And what are the eight? Superabundance of wind, and of bile, and of phlegm, the union of these humours, variations in temperature, the avoiding of dissimilarities, external agency, and Karma. From each of these there are some sufferings that arise, and these are the eight causes by which many beings suffer pain. And therein whosoever maintains that it is Karma that injures beings, and besides it there is no other reason for pain, his proposition is false." (*The Questions of King Milinda*, part 1 [IV.1.63], pp. 191–2)

Here personal karma is listed as only one among many possible causes of suffering. External factors could certainly include actions by other persons or natural elements.

### Determinism, Freedom, and Moral Responsibility

Even on the minimalist account given by Potter of the "classical karma theory of India" (CKTI), much is determined by karma. Most views of karma have stronger notions of the extent of karmic determination than this. As an explanatory factor, karma accounts for at least some particular events in one's life as it unfolds. Even on the CKTI, dispositions to act and think in certain ways are part of the effects of karma. Actions that are determined by those dispositions would then seem to also be determined by karma. What then of freedom and moral responsibility? Does acceptance of karma imply fatalism?

The response is to claim that one was responsible for the previous actions that bore karmic fruit in this life. Karma accounts typically assert that the individual has moral responsibility and a concomitant sense of personal freedom necessary for moral responsibility. Each person must play out the karmic effects that have to be received in that life, but each person is also responsible for moral choices made in this present life. In a forward-looking manner, then, there are frequent injunctions in the various traditions to live a moral life as the first stage in one's journey toward final release.

Buddhism has an additional matter to resolve in this context. Can the doctrines of karma, moral responsibility, and no-self all be held consistently? Typical criticisms of Buddhism in this regard ask who it is that is exercising the freedom requisite for moral responsibility. Responses usually emphasize a complete description of all that makes up a person based only on the five *skandhas* without resorting to any enduring self. If a willing person can be so described, then the notion of freedom requisite for moral responsibility is held to be present.

## Karma and Release

If the preservation of justice is an important feature of karma doctrine, perhaps the lesson of karma is simply to perform good actions and avoid bad actions, since one will never escape the effects of bad actions. If karma even under the minimalist CKTI account stipulates that karma dictates the status of rebirths, another lesson of karma doctrine enjoins good actions so that one would have an advantageous reincarnation/rebirth. These are certainly part of the teachings of karma thought and they serve as guides to action. If left here, however, a significant feature of karma teaching is ignored. An ultimate goal in traditions with karma is release from the cycle of reincarnations or deaths and births. The additional claim is that it is karma (whether good or bad) which necessitates rebirths. Melford Spiro has suggested that there are two soteriological goals in traditions with karma: “nibbanic” (from *nibbana*, Pali for *nirvana*) and “kammatic” (from *kamma*, Pali for *karma*) (see Egge 2002, ch. 1, for an extended discussion). The nibbanic goal is release from the world of reincarnations/rebirths and focuses on detachment from the fruits or results of any action (see the Bhagavad-Gita for more on this teaching). The kammatic goal is for a good next reincarnation or rebirth.

Are these divergent goals compatible? Is there one ethic here or are these examples of competing ethical systems? There is much to be discussed on this matter, but one initial approach is to treat the kammatic as a useful means (*upaya*) for laypersons who are unable to aim directly for ultimate release. Aiming at a better rebirth might be a preliminary goal that would put them in a position later to aim at the nibbanic goal.

This distinction is useful to illustrate that Buddhist teaching is often offered on several levels: a mundane level of discourse (and truth), and a supramundane level of discourse (and truth).

## Transfer of Merit

Karmic effects may weigh down an individual such that even a good next rebirth seems difficult. Alternative paths can be loosely grouped under the idea of “transfer of merit.” While transfer of merit or mitigation of individual karmic outcomes are at times spoken of as later Mahayana developments in the case of Buddhism, transfer of merit is present in early Buddhism and is also present in Hinduism. It is only Jainism that diverges sharply on this matter, denying that anyone else can do something effective about one’s own karma. Different traditions offer different aspects of transfer of merit or mitigation of karmic outcomes.

Transfer of merit in some of its earliest forms (e.g., in Hindu ritual and sacrifice) is done for the benefit of suffering ghosts or ancestors. It includes both aspects of ritual action and intentionality (an intention that the benefits of this deed should go to X). Devotion (*bhakti*) to a deity is also another way in which karmic effects can be mitigated through the activity of the deity. Individually, negative karmic outflows can be reduced by repentance or other good actions. Some diseases are even held to be signs of mitigated karmic effects, where those karmic effects would have been much worse

without repentance or some other efficacious religious activity, and where the disease is seen as a chance for further spiritual growth (see Nichiren 1992, "Curing Karmic Disease," pp. 213–21).

The creation of Pure Lands and great storehouses of merit by bodhisattvas as part of the bodhisattva ideal is another way in which karmic effects are said to be mitigated or overcome outright. The Pure Land of Amida Buddha, for example, is where one can go after death if one has called on Amida's name for assistance. As such, it is a circumvention of a rebirth conditioned by karma.

The bodhisattva ideal raises some questions. On the one hand, there is a sense in which the law of karma is not broken since there is a transfer of merit to wipe out the karmic effects that one has accrued (that is, if one adopts something like a ledger metaphor for karma). On the other hand, the necessary linkage of karmic outflows to the individual seems to be broken. Further questions might have to do with the causal chains themselves which make up individuals. How exactly are the latent karmic effects expunged from one's causal flow?

## Recent Developments

One recent development is an emphasis on group karma by thinkers such as Vivekananda and Gandhi (see Creel, "Contemporary Philosophical Treatments of Karma and Rebirth," in Neufeldt 1986). Aside from issues of compatibility with traditional texts and practices, the concept of group karma generates certain questions. Can we be responsible for what someone else did (someone who is not in my reincarnated/reborn line of previous lives)? Ideas of group karma take different forms, but they do create tension with at least one traditional impetus for the concept of karma, namely to differentiate between individuals. Perhaps the differentiation of groups can be considered to be similar but at the level of aggregates.

Other areas of contemporary interest explore possible linkages between karma theory and contemporary science in fields such as psychology and evolutionary theory.

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## Part IX

# Current Trends and New Directions

# Theological Realism and Antirealism

ROGER TRIGG

## Understanding and Reality

Is what is real independent of human understanding, or a mere projection of it? This issue intersects with other major philosophical issues. Contemporary versions of materialism, such as physicalism and naturalism, implicitly relate reality to the capabilities of human science, while contemporary relativism explicitly connects our understanding of what is real with our social context or tradition (Trigg 2002). Yet what reality is like and how we conceive it are always separate questions. Metaphysics (the theory of what exists) should never be reduced to epistemology (the theory of the status of our knowledge). This, at least, is what the realist would maintain. Some antirealists would wish to tie our conceptions of truth and reality to the way human language is integrated with particular ways of acting. This latter point is often linked with the later Wittgenstein's ideas of forms of life and language-games (see Chapter 19, Wittgenstein; and Chapter 77, Wittgensteinian Philosophy of Religion). The antirealist will always therefore tend to make a reference to human capabilities and limitations, and to connect our ideas of reality to the particular circumstances in which they can be formed.

How then can we characterize the nature of reality, and what is its connection with our understanding? Verificationists typically linked such a question to a scientific world-conception, so that what cannot be verified scientifically is not real (see Chapter 54, The Verificationist Challenge). This ignores any need for a metaphysical basis for science, and assumes that we do not need to justify the practice of science (Trigg 1993). It then just appears self-evident that scientific method provides the only way to truth. Yet such an approach immediately rules out the possibility of access to anything which is logically independent of our understanding. The "transcendent" is ruled out by definition. Indeed it runs into problems with science, since physics, for example, does not seem afraid of dealing with entities which are in principle inaccessible to human beings. What of the other side of the universe or the interior of a black hole, let alone the many micro-entities continually being claimed by physics, even though they are unobservable?

If the notion of entities beyond our experience can be argued to be a necessary presumption in contemporary science, it hardly seems an objection to religion that it wishes to refer to the transcendent. Yet the debate between realists and antirealists has become



as fierce within philosophy of religion as it has been within philosophy of science (Trigg 1998). This suggests how realism and antirealism can appear in many guises. One could for instance be an antirealist about morality and a realist about tables and chairs, or an antirealist about the latter but a realist about subatomic particles. There would certainly be no contradiction about being a realist in science and an antirealist in religion. John Hick, himself a realist, makes this point when he says: "There are in fact probably no pan-realists who believe in the reality of fairies and snarks as well as of tables and electrons; and likewise few if any omni-non realists, denying the objective reality of a material world and of other people as well as of gravity and God" (Runzo 1993, p. 4). In fact solipsism is the limiting case of antirealism, just as an emphasis on objective reality totally unrelated to our understanding can lead to skepticism. Nevertheless, although Hick is right about the varieties of realism and antirealism, what he says betrays a common confusion about the status of realism. Realists do not necessarily claim the existence of something. They are saying that the thing in question could exist. In other words a realist about fairies could deny there are any with perfect consistency, but would hold that their existence is a possibility. This would be in distinction to the person who claims that talk of fairies is in the same class as talk of heffalumps. We could never recognize one, since they are by definition imaginary beings.

Realists about the existence of God will typically regard the question of whether God exists as genuine and would assert that such existence is in no way logically dependent on our understanding. Indeed, they would claim, God's existence must be wholly independent of the nature of contingent beings like ourselves. Atheists, however, would also agree with this. They might accept that there could be a God, but hold that there is not. This is an argument about what is the case. Atheism holds that reality does not include God, but its readiness to talk of falsity suggests that it concedes the possibility of some form of truth in this area. Similarly, agnostics suspend judgment about the issue. One of the motives for antirealism about God comes from an unwillingness to think in any way of God as part of the "furniture" of reality, as somehow a mere ingredient in any objective state of affairs. God, it is often said, is not one object amongst others. Yet it is only a short step from this to conceiving of God as not objective at all.

Antirealism implicitly rules out strict atheism, since many antirealists would recoil in horror from the idea that God is a Being, one amongst many, who may or may not exist. Religion, they would claim, is not in the business of speculating about facts. What difference would it make to our lives if we accept that it is possible or even probable that fairies, quarks, or God exist? The acknowledgment of the existence of an entity is surely, they would argue, not what true religion is about. Wittgenstein says: "If the question arises as to the existence of a god or God, it plays an entirely different role to that of the existence of any person or object I ever heard of" (1966, p. 59). The role of concepts in people's lives is the focus of Wittgenstein's interest. Having abandoned his earlier picture theory of meaning, he emphasizes instead the importance of how people use words (and hence concepts), and the part they play in their wider life. This means that he stresses the public and social role of concepts, so that what is important is the life we share with others, and the system of thought to which we happen to belong. It is what people collectively do with their concepts, and not what entity a concept purports to refer to or name, which gives them their meaning.

A corollary of this approach is a challenge to the very idea of religious claims resting on evidence. Instead of being understood as making claims about the possible existence of anything, which might in turn be doubted, theists have to be seen as reaffirming their commitment to a way of life. All religious assertions have then to be reinterpreted in a manner which assumes that they are not claiming truth about an objective state of affairs. This not only applies to the question of God's existence. It also covers all religious claims which might appear to justify faith on rational grounds. Wittgenstein, for example, questions the way in which Christianity rests on a historical basis. Even if the historical facts are indubitable (as of course they are not), Wittgenstein feels that that is not enough. He says, "The understanding wouldn't be enough to make me change my whole life" (1966, p. 57). His conclusion therefore is that Christianity cannot rely on history in the sense that an ordinary belief in historic facts provides evidence for Napoleon. An acceptance of historical probability in a spirit of rational detachment seems, he believes, far removed from a genuine faith which animates one's whole life. The question to be addressed then becomes not "What is faith in?" or "Is it reasonable or justifiable?" It is "What does it mean for one's life?" There is, he thinks, no room in faith "for the doubt," as he puts it, "that would ordinarily apply to any historical propositions" (1966, p. 57). Beliefs about Jesus have a different function from beliefs about ordinary historical figures.

Wittgenstein does not consider that language-games or forms of life are the kind of thing that could be justified (Trigg 1998). Both concepts, peculiar to him, are intended to underline the way in which our speaking of a language is interwoven with our social practices. Thus he is able to say of a language-game that "it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there – like our life" (Wittgenstein 1969, p. 559). There is no possibility of standing outside such an activity and criticizing it or even giving it external support. One is either a participant, living the life and using the language, or one is going to be unable properly to understand what is going on or being said. There can be no room for making claims which purport to be true for everyone, whether they recognize it or not. As a result, the very idea of an objective reality confronting us all makes no sense.

As a follower of Wittgenstein, D. Z. Phillips (1970b) goes so far as to claim that if a people lost their belief in God, "belief in God is not intelligible but false for them, but unintelligible." Believers and non-believers thus live in different worlds, and there is no neutral or detached position where anyone can stand to criticize the other. As Wittgenstein says, "Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and heretic" (1969, p. 611). Wittgenstein explicitly rules out the possibility of giving reasons, because he believes that "at the end of reasons comes persuasion." In a dark aside, he remarks, "Think what happens when missionaries convert natives" (1969, p. 611). Rationality is ruled out, together with any possibility of metaphysics, and any understanding of a reality which confronts us all whether we recognize it or not. Changes of way of life cannot thus be motivated by reason, precisely because what counts as a reason can only be recognized within a particular tradition or community which already possesses some shared understanding (see Chapter 51, Tradition).

## Tradition and Interpretation

We all need a tradition to provide us with a platform from which to deal with reality. Everyone depends on some particular background of concepts and beliefs. One cannot meet reality in the raw, devoid of any preconceptions. The antirealists, however, are saying much more than this by denying that there is anything real beyond the tradition which could ground or justify it. It would be possible to speak of what is judged correct or incorrect within, say, Catholicism, or indeed Christianity, but not of whether either as a whole is misguided. It is hardly surprising that antirealists seem to be on the slippery slope which leads to relativism (see Trigg 1973). Indeed, according to Don Cupitt, a philosopher of religion, "reality has now become a mere bunch of disparate and changing interpretations" (Runzo 1993, p. 46). He dismisses a "realistic ontology, the notion that there is something out there prior to and independent of our language and theories, and against which they can be checked" (Cupitt 1991, p. 82). The question remains as to what is left. Yet this highlights a general problem with relativism. When it denies any idea of reality and talks of the construction of worlds by different societies rather than their discovery, it appears to be putting all this forward as itself a fact about the world. Once relativists are seen as also in the business of construction, they have no claim to be listened to by anyone else.

This approach is very typical of so-called postmodernism, which has reacted against Enlightenment views about reason and truth. In the later Enlightenment, particularly in eighteenth-century France, conceptions of reason and truth became very materialist, anchored firmly in science. Sometimes reactions against this can appear to be favorable to religion. By removing the possibility of any "grand narrative," postmodernism removes science from its pedestal. Unable to claim an objective truth, valid for all, or to tell us what "reality" is like, it becomes merely one tradition amongst others. It therefore does not appear to be in a position to decry any religion. Yet the same anti-realism, and relativism, which motivates the postmodern removal of science from its pedestal also is a death threat to religious belief. Religion, too, becomes one tradition among many, one perspective on "the world" among many alternatives. There is no more reason to adopt it than to adopt a scientific worldview, since "the world" is constituted by our beliefs, whatever they may be. Religious faith cannot be proved false, because it cannot claim truth. It is not about anything.

One subtle form of antirealism reinterprets what we mean when we use religious language. It is not going to stop us from talking of God's reality, but will interpret what most of us mean in an unfamiliar way. This is the approach of D. Z. Phillips, who insists that our beliefs cannot be divorced "from the situations in human life in which they have their sense" (Runzo 1993, p. 89). What religious believers really mean, according to Phillips, is very different from what they think they mean. "What," he asks, "is involved in believing something to be true?" (1993, p. 92). He alleges that the realist can give no intelligible answer to this question, because what we apparently have beliefs about is so sundered from our beliefs and practices that our beliefs can no longer be understood. The realist, he claims, "severs belief from its object" (1993, p. 107). This is hardly surprising because this is the whole point of realism. What we have beliefs about is not meant to be logically related to them. Phillips, however, considers our

beliefs to be so anchored in our practices that they cannot be understood as projections onto something inaccessible. It is perhaps significant that the article in which he makes these claims is entitled "On Really Believing." The realist will insist that whether we really believe or not is a different issue from the connection of our beliefs to reality. The test of our sincerity lies in our actions. The test of truth, of having beliefs about what is actually real, must be different. This presupposes the intelligibility of the notion of what is actually real or "out there." It assumes the very split between the subject and object of belief which is challenged by antirealists. Thus while Phillips is happy to claim that God is a spiritual reality, he will still resist realist assumptions. Following Wittgenstein, he will insist that what matters is the "grammar" of spiritual reality. In other words, although we may still go on using the same language, to understand what is meant we have to relate it to the rest of our lives. This brings us back to Wittgenstein's ideas of forms of life.

There can thus be agreement that God is "independent" of us, but the disagreement between realist and antirealist about the meaning of "independent" may mean that nothing has been resolved. Phillips' view is that when people claim that they wish to hold on to traditional religious beliefs, what they are really doing is insisting on a traditional philosophical account of their meaning. Wittgenstein felt that we can be misled by our own language, and Phillips similarly claims that religious concepts can be systematically misunderstood. Thus he can claim about life after death: "Eternity is not an extension of this present life, but a mode of judging it. Eternity is not more life, but this life seen under certain moral and religious modes of thought" (1970a, p. 49). Even given such a radical reinterpretation, he holds that everyone can still go on using religious language as before. Yet the result of this is that people do not believe what they thought they did. From the realist point of view, it seems as if Phillips is actually subverting language. Certainly realists will be reluctant to restrict reality to what is observable. The objectively real can never be understood in physics or anywhere else as merely what is empirically accessible. Phillips' reluctance to see reality as anything other than what can be experienced suggests that he himself is still far too influenced by empiricist assumptions. It is perhaps noteworthy that these can continue to provide strong motivation for the espousal of antirealism.

### Forms of Realism

A distinction is sometimes made between various forms of realism, such as naive and critical realism. The terms are typically used in connection with perception, but John Hick, for example, talks of naive religious realism "which assumes that divine reality is just as spoken of in the language of some tradition" (Runzo 1993, p. 7). He contrasts it with the kind of critical realism which refers to a transcendent divine reality, but "is conscious that this reality is always thought and experienced by us in ways which are shaped and colored by human concepts and images" (Runzo 1993, p. 7). Hick is himself deeply opposed to what he terms "non-realism," because it stops us from maintaining that there is any benign reality beyond this universe, or any way in which what he terms "the spiritual project of our existence" can continue beyond this life (Runzo

1993, p. 12). The result must, he thinks, be a profound “cosmic pessimism.” Religion has to be realist to provide for the grounding of any hope.

Anyone confronted by religious disagreement may be tempted to make the kind of distinctions used by Hick. Unless we wish to claim finality for our understanding of God (whoever “we” may be), we are bound to recognize a gap between our limited understanding and the infinity of God. No tradition is likely to possess the whole truth. Christianity has always recognized the partial nature of our knowledge, and St Paul contrasts it with the full knowledge that we will obtain in the presence of God. A simple naive realism can hardly be held by any religion that takes the transcendence of God seriously. Yet Hick risks making the whole content of our beliefs relative to the concepts provided by our culture. He refers to “the different ways of thinking-and-experiencing the Real” (1989, p. 15). In this he is deliberately following Kant in distinguishing, as he puts it, “different phenomenal awarenesses of the same noumenal reality” (1989, p. 15). It seems that because there can be no independent access to the so-called Real except through one tradition or another, there can be no clear way of adjudicating between them. The danger is that a noumenal reality drops out as irrelevant just because it is unknowable. Then we are merely left with the cultural fact of different religions (see Chapter 84, Religious Pluralism).

Realism gives point to our search for truth, by sundering the subject and object of knowledge. There is something to know. Yet skepticism can arise because of the problem of how we can gain knowledge. The term “critical realism” appears to run together epistemological questions about our capabilities with metaphysical ones about the status of objective reality. Whatever is real is so whether we use our critical faculties or not. How naive we are says nothing about what may exist. We can recognize our own fallibility, but without the prior conception of an objective reality even the idea of fallibility does not have much sense. There is then nothing to be wrong about, and there could be no rational grounds for revising our views since the acquisition of genuine knowledge is prohibited. Contact between conceptual schemes, such as different religions, can then only be a matter of political negotiation rather than a search for truth.

Metaphysical realism in religion upholds the “otherness” of God. Yet any religion should try to give an answer to the question of how knowledge of the reality of God is possible. What realism must maintain in a theological context is that religion is not in the business of constructing reality, but of responding to something that is totally apart from us. Gordon Kaufman (1993) puts forward a “constructive theology” which risks being a contradiction in terms. He considers that our idea of mystery must be traced back to a human origin. Yet the more he tries to examine the way the word “God” works as a human symbol, the less room he gives for any understanding of anything transcendent. The notion of an “ultimate mystery” (1993, p. 357) does little more than point to an ultimate void. The danger, too, is that the more we emphasize our own role in the construction of symbols, the more difficult it is to continue to be gripped by them. Realism in theology, like realism elsewhere, attempts to ground our knowledge. Indeed, in pointing to a transcendent God, it hopes to point to the source and guarantee of all knowledge.

Is this all an abstruse dispute about the meaning of language, having little to do with how we live our lives, or with what ordinary people call “the real world”? Philosophical pragmatists are impatient of metaphysics. Yet if theology withdraws from making

claims about a reality which is the same for everyone, it immediately loses any relevance for those who are not already believers. The latter may lose any reason for continuing to believe. The fact that some reality may be transcendent, and spiritual, perhaps to be confronted in a life beyond this one, does not make it less relevant, since one day all will die. It is only if a religion claims truth about the nature of the reality we all must confront that it demands attention from those outside its faith.

Many would hold that the rational justification of religious belief is an impossibility because religion is not in the business of reason and truth (see Chapter 52, Fideism). They may, for instance, typically hold that reason is the sole province of the physical sciences, on the specious grounds, stemming from an outmoded logical positivism, that only they can contribute to a knowledge that can be publicly shared. Yet this refusal to admit that religion is in the business of talking about any objective reality, independent of believers and open to everyone, leads directly to the view that it is not a suitable participant in the public sphere (Trigg 2007; see also Chapter 70, Religion, Law, and Politics; and Chapter 71, Theism and Toleration). It is a subjective matter, for individuals, or at best a communal practice for different groups. It has no place in public discussions in the public realm. This quickly leads to a view, which is all too prevalent in many countries, that religion is a private matter, with nothing to contribute to the common good. The privatization of religion is intimately connected with antirealist conceptions of its subject-matter. What is subjective merely relates to individuals. What is objective, and independent of all our conceptions, is of concern to all. Realism must in the end be a philosophy about public religion, and it must make all religion, true or false, a fit subject for public reasoning.

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# Wittgensteinian Philosophy of Religion

JOHN H. WHITTAKER

In his later work Ludwig Wittgenstein suggested a very distinctive view of religious belief, but he did not suggest anything like a new theory of religion (see Chapter 19, Wittgenstein). He conceived of the philosophy of religion as he conceived of philosophy in general, as a “grammatical inquiry” intended to capture insights that are already ingredient in our habits of speech. But critics complain that his grammatical approach to religion simply constitutes *one more* theory about how the nature of faith claims is to be understood, and a poor theory at that. For his theory, the critics say, entails a number of objectionable “isms” – non-cognitivism, fideism (see Chapter 52, Fideism), antirealism (see Chapter 76, Theological Realism and Antirealism), and conceptual relativism. Yet the majority of Wittgenstein’s followers would agree with D. Z. Phillips, who vigorously denied that Wittgenstein held *any* of these philosophical views (see, for example, chapters 2 and 4 in Phillips’ *Wittgenstein and Religion*). Such views can only be read into Wittgenstein’s work by overlooking crucial distinctions that he took pains to bring out. Answering these objections is like answering people who, having heard a number of distinctions concerning the use of the word “good,” simply ignore them and ask, “Yes, but is ‘x’ good or not?”

The tendency to ask such over-simplified questions comes from over-generalizations about what religious beliefs must be like if they are to be credible. In his *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, Wittgenstein takes the belief in a last judgment as an example. This belief is an item of faith, not the straightforward prediction that it appears to be. Most of us simply assume that this belief is like any other conjecture about the future, and that its credibility depends entirely on how probable it is made by the evidence. Yet believers do not treat this conviction like a conjecture and in particular do not expose it to falsification; for even if apocalyptic events do not occur as predicted, believers do not give up their belief in a coming Day of Judgment; they only revise their calculations about when it will occur. Thus, they do not treat this conviction as a hypothetical conjecture at all, but as an *unshakeable* truth.

For those who assume that *all* beliefs about future events must have the same relation to evidence, it can be difficult to follow Wittgenstein’s point here. He struggles against the assumption that all contentious beliefs, including religious assertions, represent descriptions about the external world, and that belief in the truth or falsity of these assertions is to be justified by evidence about how things stand. Yet when we

examine the place this belief occupies in the thinking of believers, we find that it plays a much different role. Its unshakeable status does not follow from evidence but belongs to the logical role that the belief plays as a kind of axiomatic truth (Wittgenstein 1967, p. 54). Indeed, the only evidence that seems appropriate is remarkably flimsy if judged according to the usual evidential standards (p. 58). The thinking of believers represents “a different kind of reasoning” (p. 58), something that is not a matter of evidential grounds in the first place. For the belief in a last judgment “regulates for all” in the lives of believers, and its meaning – its semantic weight – comes from that (pp. 54–5).

The role that such beliefs play in judgment indicates the fundamental logical difference between these truth-claims and the nature of objectively determinable hypotheses. Religious claims function logically like principles of judgment, which determine the kind of judgment that belongs to an entire form of thought, just as the principle of sufficient reason (interpreted causally) serves to regulate scientific explanation. When causal explanations for events cannot be found, scientists assume that such causes nonetheless exist. So the principle of sufficient reason does not depend on the evidence about what has and has not been discovered. It is an indefeasible assumption of science, and the same is true of most religious beliefs. Their credibility is not a function of evidence but is logically required for the particular form of judgment that they “regulate.” In the usual sense of the word, then, the belief in a last judgment “is not reasonable” and “does not pretend to be. ... Reasons look entirely different from normal reasons” (1967, 55); and the controversy between believers and non-believers is not something that can be settled simply by accumulating evidence.

These last points are on his mind when he says that religious disputes are generally not differences of opinion. In differences of opinion, we can generally see what it means for another person to make a mistake. It is logically possible, that is, to show that other people’s opinions are in fact *errors*; and we can discover the truth because we share a more fundamental agreement about the public standards by which we decide objectively who is right and who wrong. In religious disputes, though, this common system of judgment is simply not there. Believers and non-believers are on differing planes of judgment (1967, p. 53).

The problem here is that we do not recognize the logical fact that we are on different planes. We simply *assume* that religious beliefs are the familiar representational and descriptive assertions they appear to be, and that they are to be justified in accordance with objective standards. Yet what if religious beliefs are not descriptive representations of external facts? If the beliefs at issue function in an analogous way to the logical role of principles of judgment, their force will be completely misunderstood when they are seen as mere descriptions. Then their affirmation would not change the way we think. All of this, or something very much like it, is implicit in Wittgenstein’s remark that religious pictures do not describe the world but “regulate” for all in [the believer’s life]” (1967, p. 54).

To throw some light on this regulative role that religious ideas play, we might compare them to moral beliefs. The peculiar role of moral principles is relatively clear because such basic moral convictions are bound up with an *evaluative* form of judgment. Thus, when we evaluate the facts morally, we do not simply accept human behavior as it is: we assess its worth, we speak of our obligations to change it, we assign or accept responsibility for it, etc. The affirmation of moral principles is the means by

which we enter into this form of judgment, and much the same is true of religious beliefs. Instead of simply multiplying the facts before us, religious teachings offer a distinctive way of taking them in, of digesting them in self-understanding, and thus informing the attitudinal stance we take toward others and the world in which our lives unfold (Wittgenstein 1980, p. 61). It is God's world and we are his children. To believers, having *faith* in this idea brings a calming perspective to bear not only on the worth of external things but ultimately on our own worth and on our own peace of mind.

Unlike moral principles, however, religious beliefs often disguise their point in the form of "pictures" about the way things are – pictures of a supreme being, of his sacrificial atonement, of his all-seeing eye, etc. These pictorial images serve to encourage the adjustments in thought that go with seeing the world in a new perspective. "All life belongs to the goodness of God, whose mercy is everlasting." Believers say such things to restore confidence in the face of dispiriting events, to provide inner peace of mind in the midst of suffering and hope even when life seems hopeless. And it is in such changes in the *manner* in which we understand ourselves that the *sense* of religious beliefs is felt (cf. 1980, p. 64).

This is no small point, as it means that believing in God actually *entails* the acceptance of a new way of seeing the world. Believers do not first assent to a religious opinion *as a factual or cognitive claim* and then subsequently try to bring their personal lives into line with the changes that supposedly follow from it. I say "supposedly" here because it is difficult to see how purely factual claims *could* bear such transforming implications. Believers do not become genuine believers unless they bring themselves personally into line with the regulatory point of the principles they affirm. Thus, there are not two parts of religious belief – believing *that* a supernatural fact happens to obtain, and believing *in* it as a religious conviction. Believing *that* a dogma of faith is true entails believing *in* it as a regulative idea that opens up a whole new way of thinking. Belief *itself*, in other words, transforms a person's existential perspective on life.

Wittgenstein did not put the point in this way, but he is emphatic in saying that an impersonal or objective handling of religious doctrines is logically off the mark. "Christianity says that sound [rationally justified] doctrines are all useless. That you have to change your *life*" (1980, p. 53). This change is made *in believing*, and the reasons for believing become bound up with the reasons for making a change in one's life.

It strikes me that a religious belief could only be something like a passionate commitment to a system of reference. Hence, although it's a belief, it's really a way of living (or a way of assessing life). It is passionately seizing hold of *this* interpretation. Instruction in a religious faith, therefore, would have to take the form of a portrayal, a description, of that system of reference, while at the same time being an *appeal to conscience* [italics added]. And this combination would have to result in the pupil himself, on his own accord, passionately taking hold of the system of reference. (1980, p. 64)

The reasons for seizing hold of a new way of assessing life "look entirely different from ordinary reasons." They grow out of self-examination and conscience, and they demand self-honesty above all else. Such considerations form the proper context for the

regulative affirmations of faith, the context in which its transforming point emerges, and the context in which whatever credibility it has is to be found.

These are Kierkegaardian ideas – ideas that are bound up with the inward problems of becoming a self; but Wittgenstein obviously agreed with them (see Schoenbaumsfeld 2007, ch. 1). Because faithfulness is necessarily bound up with self-understanding, religious knowledge is akin to self-knowledge generally. And so it is easy to see why Wittgenstein observes that considering religious claims with the detachment of impersonal reason “would destroy the whole business” (1967, p. 56; see also p. 54).

In short, issues that involve matters of external fact and that are to be judged by objective criteria do not entail a personal transformation in the believer’s *self*-understanding, yet religious belief involves precisely this. As Wittgenstein observed early on in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, the objectively known facts “contribute only to the setting of the problem [of life], not to its solution” (6.4321, 6.432). Only self-transformation can solve these problems. Yet whereas he once thought this insight meant such self-transformations must be accomplished *independently* of beliefs, he later came to see that other logical kinds of beliefs are the very means of such transformation.

If this relation to personal concerns tied religious belief to subjectively arbitrary considerations, then we could see why Wittgenstein’s critics might characterize his views as a pernicious version of fideism (the view that religious beliefs are properly irrational and immune from criticism). But this charge, as I suggested earlier, is simplistic, as are the related accusations that he is a non-cognitivist, an antirealist, and a relativist. So let us outline, if only briefly, a response to these charges, beginning with the claim that Wittgenstein treats faithfulness as an ultimately arbitrary matter.

After he said in the *Lectures and Conversations* that those who have no familiarity with a religious pattern of thinking cannot directly contradict the tenets of believers, Wittgenstein went on to note that such “controversies look quite different from normal controversies” (1967, p. 56). Each party to the dispute seems to reason in a different way, but he *did not say that reasons do not exist*. His point was only that the sort of reasons we are used to in ordinary cognitive disputes are *not the sort involved in holding religious convictions*. Believers, for example, might say their beliefs have been borne out in their experience, that they have enabled them to see themselves and their relation to others more clearly, that they have led them home to their true selves, etc. There is nothing irrational about citing such considerations as reasons for adhering to religious ideas as truths to live by. Granted, this sort of answer does not constitute an *objective* test for the truth of a religious belief. If a test is supposed to certify a belief in an objective way, independent of the belief’s application as a regulative principle, then the way that people test their beliefs with their lives is hardly a test at all. If it were such a test, we would be able to see the truth value of the claims in question without even considering the role that believing plays in our lives. That is why Wittgenstein said that “reasons look entirely different from ordinary reasons.” They have no logical force independent of the changes they bring to a believer’s form of thinking and living.

The same applies to pragmatic forms of justification (see Chapter 50, Pragmatic Arguments). Pragmatic justification also envisions independent evidence – in this case, the pragmatic utility of a belief – as a reason for thinking that the belief is true. But as long as this utility can be recognized independently of actually believing, it provides

no logical ground for thinking that a belief is true. At best, it is a good excuse for a form of behavior. In any case, Wittgenstein knew such reasons do not amount to logical grounds for an objective hypothesis; and therefore, the application of pragmatic tests to religious belief simply reflects the same confusion regarding the status of religious claims, which have a role more like that of first principles that regulate self-involving judgment (see his notes in *On Certainty* (1972), entry numbers 422, 429, 474, and *passim*).

In the notes on the concept of certainty, Wittgenstein says little about religious belief, but he offers a valuable hint about the appropriate form that argument takes when conflicting principles, or “systems of reference,” are at issue. He reminds us that “after reason comes persuasion”; and then, as an afterthought, he mentions the cases in which missionaries convert natives (1972, pp. 611, 612). We need not assume that he meant by “persuasion” a merely psychological means of manipulation. He could just as well have been referring to the kind required to introduce new ways of thinking. After all, many of the same things that we do to persuade people are described as a form of education when we talk about training the young. Some forms of persuasion are logically appropriate in such contexts; some forms are also logically appropriate when adult differences in matters of principle are at issue.

Take the moral case again, for example. We think it appropriate that everyone, including our children, develop a moral conscience. When our own children lack such a conscience, we regard this as a severe abnormality. We think they fail to see an aspect of our common life there before them, waiting to be realized. We might even say that they are *unreasonable* in resisting moral instruction, not so much because they lack an understanding of logical grounds and justified inferences, but because they do not respond to morally persuasive reasoning in the way that other children do. We urge children to think about how they would feel if others behaved toward them the way they behave toward others. We ask them to pay attention to those in need, and so on. In trying to develop a child’s moral sense, these are reasonable approaches to take, not because they constitute familiar grounds of inference but because they engender a new *kind of reasoning* with a new *kind of evaluative ground*. Had Wittgenstein discussed this kind of due persuasion in detail, I think his critics would be less inclined to call him a fideist.

Moral assertions, however, are widely believed to lack cognitive significance. Are religious claims, in Wittgenstein’s view, also lacking in cognitive meaning? He did not discuss this issue, at least not in the abbreviated way that I am trying to present his views; but clearly he would have regarded the question as a compound issue. If by a non-cognitive conception of belief, we mean a view in which religious beliefs are purely *descriptive* accounts of factual happenstance, then, yes, Wittgenstein would say that *in this sense* they lack cognitive significance. Yet if one means that claims lacking in cognitive significance *cannot be said to be true or false in any sense of the word*, then the later Wittgenstein would have sharply disagreed with such a characterization.

Believers obviously do accept truths of *some* kind in holding fast to convictions of faith, but these truths involve a change in the perspective from which we understand and assess ourselves, our well-being, and the world around us – whereas beliefs that are cognitive in the sense of being *mere* descriptions of fact contribute almost nothing to self-understanding. Their recognition has nothing to do with inner discernment or



the edification of the self. Religious judgments, on the other hand, facilitate just this kind of interior insight; or at least that is their promise.

But is this kind of self-understanding a matter of knowledge? According to the standard view, knowledge is justified true belief. A belief cannot be justified unless there could, in principle, be some *objective* means of determining its truth or falsity, so that the acceptance of a belief does not depend on the vagaries of subjective judgment but on rational grounds. Wittgenstein did not deny that this view applies to empirical knowledge. But he reminds us that there are different kinds of knowledge and that this kind of impersonal knowledge is not the wisdom of religion.

The crucial issue here concerns the determinate nature of genuine propositions. Empiricists and cognitivists in general assume that the determination of truth and falsity depends on findings that can be derived directly or indirectly from empirical data. When we are pursuing this kind of knowledge, "It is always by favor of Nature that we know something" (1972, n. 505). Such favors, in other words, simply show up in this data. But this is not the only way in which the truth or falsity of everything we call a belief is determined. The rule that the truth or falsity of a proposition must be determinable is only a formal requirement, and it does not mean that this difference must be *empirically discernible in the facts as they are given to us*. The requirement means only that it must be possible to judge between the truth and falsity of a truth-claim in some responsible way. And in the case of religious beliefs, this means that our judgment must be responsive to appropriate inward pressures that steer it.

Here it is critical to keep in mind that Wittgenstein and his followers are not arguing that *objective* truths might be known in an inward way. The truths that comprise religious knowledge differ in kind from objective truths, and thus the knowledge itself differs. That is why religious knowledge is called "spiritual wisdom" or "the knowledge of faith." The discernment by which a person becomes religiously wise has to do with self-understanding, and in that context the role of evidential justification is replaced by the reinforcement that comes by way of insight. Does a religiously transformed way of life lead to any genuine insights about the meaning of our lives? Does adhering to religious truths lead people more deeply into themselves? Is true selfhood found by relying on the mystery of divine love? If not – if no such *new* understanding attends faith – then the inward recognition of this fact will prove fatal to a believer's faith. And further arguments of an objective sort, such as the proofs for the existence of God, will then have little avail.

Believers, for example, speak of the reality of their wretchedness and of their inability to escape the very real torments of their souls (1980, p. 45). These are private judgments of self-examination, but we usually accept such self-judgments if they are serious. Rather than being arbitrary, these judgments are subject to correction; but the corrections depend on deeper self-insight, not on objective considerations. That is why believers defend their faith by offering insights that are difficult for outsiders to judge. "I only thought that I was up to the task of securing my happiness, but now I realize that my true happiness depends on a power beyond my ego." Or they explain their loss of faith by saying, "I once thought that I was living God's will, but now I realize that I was only pretending. I still don't know what my life is all about." It is remarkably narrow-minded for philosophers to think that there are no genuine insights to be discovered in this

domain of inward understanding. To grant the possibility of such insight is to admit that self-knowledge is a genuine kind of knowledge, and to grant *this* is to confess that not all of the truths that make up such knowledge are objectively – i.e., impersonally – determined.

Again, Wittgenstein does not argue in exactly this way, but he might have. For he tried to remind us that there are as many kinds of truth-claims as kinds of knowledge. Whenever we rely on regulative beliefs for opening up dimensions in knowledge, and whenever we feel that genuine discernment is possible in one or another of these differing forms of understanding, we rely on truths that must be engendered, not objectively established (1972, n. 262). If we keep looking for an ultimate foundation for these truths, we find only those patterns of ungrounded forms of agreement in the ways in which we think (1972, n. 204). The participation in such ungrounded forms of agreement is not a matter of being rational or irrational; it is necessary if we are to think rationally in the first place (1972, n. 559).

Similar considerations apply to the question of whether the later Wittgenstein was a realist. There are as many senses in which we say truths are about reality as there are kinds of truth. In conforming our judgments to moral principles, we encounter the world of moral realities – obligations, responsibilities, etc. Admittedly, the sense of moral reality is not exactly what is at issue in religious belief. There we are concerned over the weight of despair, the problems we realize in searching for a meaningful life, and the inability to achieve perfect happiness. The mistake here is to insist that there is only one sense of reality to which all forms of genuine judgment must be reduced. Once we see the diversity of sense in the concept of reality, this insistence dissipates; then we can no longer naively ask, “Is God real?” as if the answer did not depend on the clarification of the question.

Before they accuse him of embracing non-cognitivism and antirealism, then, Wittgenstein’s critics will have to clarify what they mean by knowledge, by truth-claims, and by reality. They will be pressured to admit that there are different senses of words like “reality,” “reason,” “knowledge,” and “truth”; and they will have to defend the privileged status they give to their own narrow conceptions of these words. These are discussions in which those who have been influenced by Wittgenstein will be eager to participate.

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## Continental Philosophy of Religion

JOHN D. CAPUTO

Continental philosophy has been in recent years increasingly occupied with religion as a thematic object of investigation. It is fair to say that it now has an entry in a field that was once largely the domain of traditional metaphysics and contemporary analytic philosophy. This does not mean it shows any interest in the usual questions – proofs for the existence of God or the immortality of the soul, or puzzling over the conundrums of the problem of evil or the foreknowledge of God. While its approach is not for that reason any less rigorous, its rigor is expressed in close critical, phenomenological, political, and cultural analyses of religious beliefs and practices, trying carefully to show the ways that religion or at least religious structures are woven into the fabric of human history and experience, however latently or overtly, thereby giving the lie to any clean modernist divide between faith and reason, the religious and the secular, and even between theism and atheism.

Contemporary Continental philosophy has been (until quite recently) steadfastly “postmodern,” meaning that, against Descartes, it is non-foundationalist; against Kant, it does not discriminate rigorously divided domains of knowledge, ethics, and aesthetics; against Hegel, it rejects all-encompassing metaphysical systems. The canon of modernity was subjected to a strident critique by the nineteenth-century thinkers Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, the twin volcanoes from which contemporary Continental philosophy has erupted and who remain of permanent interest to the movement (see Chapter 14, *The Emergence of Modern Philosophy of Religion*; and Chapter 18, *Phenomenology and Existentialism*). However, there is little interest today in “Existentialism” and the use of Husserl’s phenomenology is extremely heterodox. Once-popular figures like Jaspers, Sartre, Camus, Buber, Marcel, and Merleau-Ponty have been largely marginalized and are now the subjects mainly of historical and exegetical studies. The reason for this is that the “epistemological subject” on which Husserl’s phenomenology turned and the “existential subject” on which existentialism turned have come under fire from two different directions, and that has decisively shaped Continental philosophy of religion.

First, the later Heidegger, who still stands tall among the figures of the earlier movement, made a watershed critique of Sartre’s statement that “existentialism is a humanism” (Heidegger 1993, pp. 213–65). Heidegger called for a meditative and poetic “thinking” while warning of the dangers of an encroaching technological and

information culture from which the “gods” have taken flight. Heidegger’s critique of “onto-theology,” by which he meant the reduction of God to a *causa sui*, a first being or first cause of other beings, in metaphysics conceived as a science of the highest causes, is the basic framework for most contemporary Continental philosophy of religion (Heidegger 2002, pp. 42–74). The alternative proposed by Heidegger (who in his youth was a devout Roman Catholic) is the god before whom one can sing and dance, embedded in what he called the “fourfold” of gods and mortals, heavens and earth, a model he had adapted from Hölderlin’s interpretation of the Greeks. The account is evocative and it has invited numerous meditations on a non-metaphysical God, many with a more biblical pedigree. Much of Continental philosophy of religion has been an attempt to reimagine God along these lines.

Secondly, and no less decisively, existential-phenomenological humanism drew the fire of “post-structuralism.” Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist and founder of modern linguistics, held that a genuinely scientific study of language was possible only if all psychological and metaphysical elements were excluded. Language, he said, was to be analyzed in strictly “structuralist” terms as a coded system of differential and arbitrary “signifiers,” in which the classical idea of language as the outer “expression” of inner mental events which “correspond to reality” had no scientific use. For de Saussure linguistic utterances (*parole*) are competent when they conform to the formal laws (*langue*) which govern every linguistic system, echoing the early modern idea of a pure rational grammar. The heart of the “post-structuralist” view was staked out by the young Derrida, who made a famous critique of de Saussure on two points (Derrida 1997, pp. 27–73): (1) He contested a lingering psychologism in de Saussure, who privileged spoken over written signifiers, instead of recognizing that speech and writing are formally equal and differ only in their material medium (air/paper, time/space). (2) Derrida argued that such systems are not governed by a finite system of laws, but are unformalizable loose systems, comparable to the process of forming metaphors and illustrated by the uncodifiable play of language in James Joyce. These criticisms were encapsulated in the neologism *différance*, meaning the open-ended differential play within and by which all the various unities of meaning – linguistic, cultural, social, historical, etc. – were constituted as provisionally stable “effects.” *Différance* is a general notion, not restricted to language. In a social system, for example, each position is defined relatively (“differentially”) to the place of others. Gilles Deleuze had made a comparable critique of dialectical difference some years earlier in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* by reading the Nietzschean “forces” as a differential play. Deleuze was proposing an alternate metaphysics of becoming, not a suspension of all metaphysics (Deleuze 1983).

The early results of this line of thinking did not appear favorable for religion. Both Derrida and Deleuze treated the idea of “God” as a regressive factor. For the early Derrida, the name of God is a “transcendental signified,” purporting to pick out an absolute metaphysical presence outside the differential play of signifiers and, bringing such play to a halt, function like a word in a dictionary that would not be defined by other words, whose meaning is somehow magically “given.” Derrida’s critique of the “metaphysics of presence,” as he called it, joined forces with the delimitation of metaphysics by Heidegger, which led their theologically minded readers to link them in a common project of “overcoming onto-theology.” Deleuze treated the name of God as a

“reactive” force, belonging to a hierarchical system of “representation” meant to contain the flow of becoming and prevent novel and anarchic effects (Deleuze 1994, pp. 28–69). At this point, Nietzsche appeared to be the high priest of a movement that seemed to be “the hermeneutics of the death of God,” as Mark Taylor put it in the first major presentation of Derrida to American theologians (Taylor 1984, p. 6). But this impression would eventually dissipate as Derrida and other Continental philosophers began to analyze the name of God in more affirmative terms.

It was pointed out early on that Derrida’s *différance* was compared to the God of negative theology. As the condition of possibility of all linguistic effects, *différance* is neither a name nor a concept, which sounds like the *deus absconditus*. Derrida responded that this means *différance* is something like a transcendental in the Kantian sense, not transcendent in the metaphysical or theological sense. But he went on to say that, nonetheless, the discourse, the tropes, and the strategies of negative theology, the attempt of language to erase its own traces, to learn “how not to speak,” were important to him (Derrida 1992). All our beliefs and practices have to pass through a kind of negative theology, that is, a certain disavowal that language could ever grasp a pure presence without difference, some naked thing in itself standing outside the differential play.

The similarity of this view to Karl Barth’s view of the inability of language (the play of signifiers) to lay hold of God, who is wholly other than human thought and language, did not go unnoticed (Ward 1995). For Derrida, of course, this is a permanent condition and it cannot be solved by an act of faith in the revealed word of God. Indeed, were Derrida’s view of language applied to scripture, scripture would be itself revealed as a composite of multiple layers of authorship, tensions in meaning, metaphors, shifting contexts and recontextualizations, a “palimpsest” rather more like the results of historical-critical studies than Barth’s theology of revelation. Furthermore, while Derrida embraced the idea of the “wholly other,” this meant for him that the “inside” of any discursive system is constituted in part by its outside, the way Protestants are constituted by not being Catholics, and hence that the system is structurally exposed to interruption by what is other. That in turn implied what Barth would reject as idolatrous, that there are prior conditions of possibility in place for the wholly other, which must always be wholly other relative to a prior horizon of expectation. No “wholly other” can purely and simply burst in upon us.

Derrida made this argument not against Barth but against Emmanuel Levinas in an early and deeply influential study of Levinas that greatly contributed to the eventual fame of the then-obscure Jewish philosopher (Derrida 1992, pp. 73–142). Derrida, born and raised a Jew, felt a deep sympathy with Levinas, which is the earliest and most important sign that “deconstruction,” as his work came to be known, is not simply the death of God redivivus. It is safe to say that no Continental thinker has been more important than Levinas to the formation of what we today call Continental philosophy of religion. In order to describe the ethical relation, which he seems simply to identify with religion, Levinas employed a language resonant with religious and scriptural tones. He speaks of the transcendence and infinity of the face of the wholly other which lays claim to us (Levinas 1999b). But this deeply theological discourse, normally reserved for God, whose “holiness” (*kaddosh*, *sainteté*) sets God apart (see Chapter 26, Holiness), is applied to the other human person (*autrui*), with the result that there is



some confusion in his thought as to just what Levinas means by God (Levinas 1996, pp. 129–48). God is not the wholly other but “deflects” our gaze to the neighbor or stranger so that religion, the relation to God (*à dieu*), means to be turned by God (*à dieu*) to the neighbor, which is ethics, into which religion seems to translate without remainder. Levinas puts this in the language of Plato and Neoplatonism. Being is an idol that compromises the holiness and ethical eminence of the face of the other, which coming from on high transcends being or is “otherwise than being” (Levinas 1999a). That expression, while inspired by Neoplatonism, has a modern sense, not unlike saying “ought” transcends “is,” or that the categorical imperative lays claim to us without the mediation of phenomenal appearances. Levinas, who was a Holocaust survivor, was contesting Hegel and especially Heidegger, both of whom he regarded as “totalizing” thinkers, thereby linking Hegel with totalitarian state Marxism and Heidegger with national socialism. He treats Heidegger as a pagan thinker who makes the neutral and impersonal horizon of Being the condition of possibility for the appearance of the other person. Levinas thus is positioned against Heidegger and Hegel as Barth is against Tillich.

Defending both Heidegger and Husserl against Levinas, Derrida strikes an intermediate position. Like Heidegger and Husserl he thinks that the “wholly other” is possible only under horizontal conditions (*différance*), but unlike them he embraces the language of the wholly other as that which shatters the horizon of expectation. In his later writings, a discourse decidedly more congenial to religion, the coming of the wholly other is orchestrated as the coming of the “event,” the “possibility of the impossible,” or the “messianic” structure of experience. Derrida had in mind an inexhaustible and constitutive structure of expectation, such that no particular and concrete messianic hope, be it in religion (Christian or Jewish) or philosophy (Marxist or Heideggerian), can ever saturate or fill this structure. Nothing can ever come which twists free from its contingency and substitutability in the play of differences. Accordingly, Derrida distinguished a deep structure of faith (*foi*) from belief (*croyance*), which has a particular creedal or doctrinal content. Faith is a constitutive structure of experience itself that belongs to a “religion without religion” (Derrida 1995, p. 49). No clean distinction can be sustained between reason and faith, if faith is the general structure of experience. In the religiously suggestive later works, he analyzes risky and “impossible” events like forgiving the unforgiveable, welcoming the *hostis* (both stranger and enemy), and giving a gift without the expectation of return. The name of God, the name he learned from the prayers on his mother’s lips, no longer simply a “transcendental signified,” is now one of among many indefinitely substitutable depositories for the possibility of the impossible, one of the names in which we dream of the promise/risk of an unforeseeable future.

In contrast to Derrida’s more Jewish horizon of an ever-coming open (messianic) future, the phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion, the foremost Catholic philosopher of his generation and a leading Descartes scholar, reflects faith in the Incarnation, a Catholic sacramental sensibility, and the New Testament emphasis on love. Marion’s project, presented as an unorthodox version of Husserlian phenomenology, centers on a “saturated phenomenon” that overwhelms the horizon of expectation. Husserl held that the act of intending an object can be fulfilled in principle but not in fact, the way the intention “Rome” is relatively empty until one visits the city, yet even after a lifetime

of living there would still be far from exhaustively fulfilled. Marion proposes the opposite (Marion 2002). Certain experiences are so richly given as to overflow the intention. In mystical theology the givenness of God totally engulfs any attempt to conceptualize or express this experience (see Chapter 48, Religious Experience; and Chapter 83, Philosophical Reflection on Mysticism). In the scriptures, the disciples are cast to the ground by the brilliance of the transfigured body of Jesus. Marion extends this analysis to works of art (especially painting, in which he shows a particular interest), everyday experiences, and erotic love, which is read in close analogy with mystical experience and is the basis of his reading of Augustine's *Confessions*. Sometimes Marion speaks as if the intentional horizon – for instance the name or notion “God” – is required in order then to be overwhelmed or saturated. Sometimes it sounds like God is “given” *tout court*, freely, of himself and on his own terms, only when the “idol” of any prior “condition” is completely reduced. Only through the reduction of the idol of Being can the God “without Being,” the God of love, be given. This expression sounds like Levinas but it draws Marion closer to the Christian Neoplatonism of the patristic tradition in which Marion is steeped and puts him at odds with the mainstream Catholic predilection for the “analogy of Being” in Thomas Aquinas (see Chapter 20, Thomism). On this point Marion sides with Heidegger's critique of metaphysics and the latter's search for the truly divine God, even if Marion concludes that Heidegger himself never finally twisted free from the spell of Being. From early on Marion was criticized for imposing a theological agenda upon phenomenology, which violated the limits of the phenomenological method (Janicaud 2000, pp. 16–103). One might wonder instead if by treating famous narratives in the New Testament as actual recorded episodes he has not imposed phenomenology upon theology, if a liberal interpretation of Husserl goes hand in hand with a somewhat literal interpretation of the New Testament. A broader circle of Catholic phenomenologists whose forerunner is Michel Henry has formed around Marion (Janicaud 2000).

Gianni Vattimo, rejecting the emphasis on the wholly other inspired by Levinas, argued for a kind of secular theology, in which “strong” metaphysical structures, like the transcendent God of Christianity, must be allowed to “weaken” and wither away (“nihilism”) in order to resurface in modern emancipatory democratic institutions (Vattimo 2004). This leads to a more secular idea of theology and a more theological concept of secularity (Winqvist 1995), in which theology and the secular bleed into each other in fact and in principle.

Other and important strains of Continental philosophy of religion do not pass through the portals of phenomenology or Heidegger. The neo-vitalism of Gilles Deleuze, while certainly antagonistic to classical metaphysical theology, is congenial to a kind of process theology (Keller 2003; see also Chapter 17, Process Theology), even of a rather theophanic sort reminiscent of John Scotus Eriugena (Hallward 2006). Seen thus his “plane of immanence” is not a simple denial of divine transcendence but the field on which the divine life unfolds, a domain of divine becoming in which the task of philosophy is to put created actualities back in touch with their creative source (Bryden 2001). This recalls Bergson's treatment of the mystics as individuals acutely conscious of the *élan vitale*. Michel Foucault proved enormously useful to religious writers (Bernauer and Carrette, 2004). His analysis of the historical constitution of sexuality and gender, his later interest in the care of the self, confession, and ascetic

practices have provided a theology of the body with rich analytic resources. There is also a significant and lively body of feminist writers (see Chapter 81, Feminism) who draw upon Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva and their critique of the masculine imaginary of Freud and Lacan to explore the ways that a feminine imaginary can be deployed to reimagine God and even the angelic order (Jantzen 1999).

At the turn of the century Hegel has made a comeback. Mark Taylor proposes a non-totalizing Hegelian system now reread as a network in which everything is connected in an open-ended and unprogrammed quasi-system like the Internet, the new “divine milieu” (Taylor 2007). An influential group of political philosophers has gained center stage, undertaking to retrieve Hegel, Descartes, and the “subject.” They regard the postmodern currents we have been tracking – themselves reactions to the totalitarianisms of the left and right – as compromises with relativism and global capitalism which substitute “political correctness” for genuine politics. Secular revisionist Marxists inspired by Lacanian psychoanalysis, they do not describe themselves as classical materialists, but look instead to theology for help in the critique of reductionistic materialism and the erosive consumerism of global capitalism. In a groundbreaking monograph on St Paul, Alain Badiou argued for a return to the Platonic universality and absoluteness of truth by way of the transformative power of an “event” that forges a militant subject of truth (Badiou 2003). The paradigm of this truth process is Paul’s conversion and apostolic mission to establish a universal that transcends difference – neither Greek nor Jew, male nor female, master nor slave. Since for Badiou the content of Paul’s preaching, the resurrected Christ, is completely mythical, living under the rule of death means market capitalism, while being “reborn” means a genuine political life free from the commoditization of capitalism. Slavoj Žižek, who is closely allied with Badiou and inspired by G. K. Chesterton, analyzes the “perverse core of Christianity” in which the “monstrous” abandonment of Jesus on the cross discloses a new version of the death of God. Philosophy (like psychoanalysis) leads us to the realization that there is no “Big Other” (God, Man, the Nation, the Party), no “theological” place of transcendence. True theology reveals we are on our own to establish the kingdom of God, or justice, on earth. The “Holy Spirit” translates into left Hegelian political communities that courageously carry on deprived of the comfort that the Comforter (Paraclete) was supposed to deliver and are prepared to take decisive action in the political order.

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## Reformed Epistemology

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One of the main disputed questions since the Enlightenment has been whether religious belief – Christian belief, let’s say – is *rational* or *reasonable* or *acceptable* or *justified*. Reformed epistemology (so called because some of its adherents taught at Calvin College and to some extent looked for inspiration to John Calvin and others in the tradition of Reformed theology) is a position in the epistemology of religious belief. Despite its evocation of the Protestant Reformation, the name is *not* meant to suggest that Roman Catholic theology or epistemology stands in need of reformation. Among the architects of Reformed epistemology are Nicholas Wolterstorff and Alvin Plantinga, both long-term professors at Calvin College, and William P. Alston, who, while showing little interest in the label (holding out for “Episcopalian epistemology”), has written *Perceiving God*, one of the most powerful developments of some of the main themes of Reformed epistemology. (See Plantinga and Wolterstorff 1983, Alston 1991, Wolterstorff 1995, and Plantinga 2000.)

Reformed epistemology has focused on belief in God as conceived in traditional Christianity, Judaism, and Islam: an almighty, all-knowing, wholly benevolent and loving immaterial person who has created the world, created human beings in his own image, and continues to act in the world by way of providential care for his creatures (see Chapter 27, Omnipotence; Chapter 28, Omniscience; Chapter 30, Goodness; Chapter 37, Creation and Conservation; Chapter 36, Divine Action; and Chapter 39, Providence). And its principal claim is that belief in God (so thought of) can be “properly basic.” What does that mean, and why is it important?

To give an answer requires us to make a brief historical excursion. Note first that for most of the twentieth century, discussion of the rational acceptability of belief in God centered on the question whether there was adequate *evidence* for the existence of God; if there *is* adequate evidence, then belief in God is rationally acceptable; if there isn’t, then it *isn’t*, the viable alternatives being atheism and agnosticism (see Chapter 80, Evidentialism). And the proper way to address *this* question, so it was thought, is to consider the arguments for and against the existence of God. On the pro side, the most popular theistic proofs or arguments have been the traditional big three: the ontological, cosmological, and teleological arguments, to use Immanuel Kant’s terms for them, together with the moral argument (see Chapter 42, Ontological Arguments; Chapter 43, Cosmological Arguments; Chapter 44, Teleological and Design Arguments; and

Chapter 45, Moral Arguments). The first of these is a fascinating but puzzling argument for the existence of a being than which none greater can be conceived; the second is an argument for a first cause or first mover; the third is an argument from the apparent design the world displays; and the moral argument contends that there couldn't really be any such thing as genuine moral obligation if there were no such being as God. Of these, the teleological argument, the argument from design, is perhaps both the most popular and the most convincing; one of the most recent and perhaps the best statement of this argument is to be found in the work of Richard Swinburne (1991).

On the other side, the anti-theistic side, the principal argument has traditionally been the *deductive argument from evil* (see Chapter 58, The Logical Problem of Evil): the argument that the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good God is logically inconsistent with the very existence of evil, or at any rate with the vast extent of pain, suffering, and human wickedness actually to be found in the world. The deductive argument from evil has fallen out of favor over the last quarter-century as philosophers have come to think there is no inconsistency here; it has been replaced by the much messier and (from the atheologian's point of view), less satisfactory *probabilistic* argument from evil, according to which it is *unlikely* that there is such a person as God, given all the evil the world in fact displays (see Chapter 59, The Evidential Problem of Evil). The argument from evil is flanked by subsidiary arguments, such as the claim that the very concept of God is incoherent (e.g., Kenny 1979; and Chapter 55, Theism and Incoherence), or the claim that modern science, or perhaps the habits of thought engendered by modern science, or perhaps some particular conclusion of modern science (evolution, say), or at any rate *something* in the neighborhood makes the existence of God unlikely (see the entries in Part 7, Religion and Science).

And the question is: which of these groups of arguments is the stronger? If the arguments *for* the existence of God are stronger, then (depending upon how *much* stronger) belief in God is rationally justified; if the arguments against are stronger, the rational conclusion is that probably there is no such person as God; if they are more or less equal in strength, then the right position is agnosticism, believing neither that there is such a person as God, nor that there isn't. Call this claim – that belief in God is rationally acceptable if and only if there is adequate evidence in the form of good arguments for it – *evidentialism*. Now why, according to the evidentialist, must there be a good argument for the existence of God if belief in God is to be rationally acceptable? After all, hardly anyone thinks you need a good argument for the existence of the past if you are to be rational in thinking you had breakfast this morning.

The answer lies in a more general line of thought (a picture, a way of conceiving our whole intellectual life) often called “classical foundationalism.” Classical foundationalism goes back to the Enlightenment and to those twin towers of Western epistemology, René Descartes and John Locke. This picture starts from a distinction between beliefs that are accepted in the basic way and those that are not accepted in that way. To accept a belief in the basic way is to believe, but not believe on the evidential basis of other things you believe; a basic belief is a sort of starting point for thought. Thus I believe the proposition  $(6 + 1 = 7)$  in the basic way; I don't reason or argue to it from other propositions I believe; my belief is immediate, unmediated by other beliefs serving as premises in an argument of which the belief in question is the conclusion. On the other hand, I believe the proposition  $341 \times 269 = 91,729$  (I've just calculated it) on



the basis of other propositions: such propositions as that  $1 \times 269 = 269$ ,  $4 \times 9 = 36$ , and the like. Alternatively, I might use my calculator, in which case I would believe the proposition on the basis of such other beliefs as that my calculator is reliable, at least for calculations of this sort, that I properly entered the numbers, and that it yielded the result in question. This is an arithmetical example, but of course there are many more examples from every area of thought.

The second and more characteristic claim of the classical foundationalist is that only *some* propositions can be *rightly*, or *properly*, or *justifiably* accepted in that basic way. The fundamental idea is that the only propositions I can justifiably accept in the basic way are propositions that are *certain* for me. What kinds of propositions are certain for me? Two kinds. First, there are some propositions about my own mental life that are certain: for example, the proposition *it seems to me that I see a horse*. (Not *I see a horse*; unlike *it seems to me that I see a horse*, this proposition is not certain for me; I could be hallucinating or dreaming and think I see a horse when there isn't one there to be seen.) Second, "self-evident" propositions are certain for us: ones like  $2 + 1 = 3$  or *if all men are mortal and Socrates is a man, then Socrates is mortal*. These are propositions so utterly obvious that one can't even understand them without seeing that they are true. And according to the classical foundationalist's picture, it is only beliefs of these two sorts that are properly basic, that is, properly accepted in the basic way. Beliefs of other kinds, in a well-run cognitive structure, will be accepted on the evidential basis of other beliefs – ultimately on the basis of beliefs of the two sorts mentioned above.

Now my belief that there is such a person as God is neither self-evident (it is possible to understand it but not accept it) nor about my own mental life. Therefore belief in God, on this picture, is properly accepted only if it is accepted on the evidential basis of other beliefs. This picture has been dominant from the Enlightenment on, and has been dominant throughout most of the twentieth century. Of course it has had variations and spinoffs, analogically related positions that differ in various ways; there is no space here to go into the squalid details. For most of the twentieth century this way of thinking was orthodoxy.

It is precisely this orthodoxy that the Reformed epistemologist disputes. As she sees it, belief in God is perfectly proper and rational, perfectly justified and in order, even if it is not accepted on the basis of such arguments, even if the believer doesn't know of any such arguments, and even if in fact there *aren't* any such arguments. This is not because, like certain theologians, she *redefines* "belief in God" so that it really amounts to something quite different, perhaps something like sitting loose with respect to the future and being authentic in the face of illness, death, suffering, and the other ills our flesh is heir to, or perhaps believing in the historical evolutionary process that has brought us all into being. No: the Reformed epistemologist is talking about God as conceived in traditional Christianity, Judaism, and Islam: an almighty, all-knowing, wholly good and loving person who has created the world and presently upholds it in being. And it is her claim that belief in such a being is properly basic.

What does it mean? And how can it be true? What, in particular, does "properly" mean here? Well, what, according to the classical picture, would be wrong with you if you believed a proposition in the basic way when it wasn't properly basic? Descartes and Locke and most of their successors thought of propriety in terms of *duty* or *obligation*: they thought that there are duties and obligations (right ways and wrong ways)

with respect to *belief* as well as with respect to *action*. These duties specify how we ought to govern or regulate belief; and the particular duty in question is just to make sure that you don't believe in the basic way a proposition that isn't certain; the only right way to believe propositions that aren't certain is on the evidential basis of propositions that are. So what is wrong with you, if you accept as basic a proposition that is not properly basic, is that you are going contrary to your epistemic duties: you have violated a requirement or obligation; you are living in epistemic sin.

It is just this claim that the Reformed epistemologist disputes. She insists on two things: first, the classical foundationalist is mistaken in thinking that there is a duty to try to accept only those two kinds of propositions in the basic way; there simply is no such duty. She holds that there is nothing whatever immoral in believing, say, that you had an orange for lunch yesterday, even if you don't believe in it on the basis of an argument from premises that are certain for you. The fact is there isn't a good (non-circular) argument from such propositions to any past phenomena, but that doesn't mean that you are flouting duty or obligation in forming such beliefs. She holds that there is nothing whatever immoral in believing in material objects in the basic way – in particular, given, as the history of modern philosophy from Descartes to David Hume and Thomas Reid indicates, that there is no good (non-circular) argument for the existence of material objects from propositions that are properly basic by classical foundationalist standards. And she also believes that there is nothing immoral or contrary to duty in believing in God in the basic way. For first, it may not be within my power *not* to believe in this way. But second, suppose that after careful reflection and consideration it just seems obvious to me that there *is* such a person as God (perhaps I have the sort of rich interior spiritual life depicted in Jonathan Edwards' *Religious Affections* [1959]): how could I possibly be going contrary to duty in holding the belief? Accordingly, the Reformed epistemologist thinks it clear that belief in God can be properly basic in the sense that one can be perfectly justified in holding this belief in the basic way. Indeed, not only is this clear, it is *obvious*, and it is hard to see how the evidentialist could have thought otherwise.

Reformed epistemology began life as a response to evidentialism, with its concern for justification; the question was: "Can I be justified in believing in God in the basic way, or do I have to have arguments if I am to be justified?" But Reformed epistemology has gone beyond questions of justification to other questions about positive epistemic status, or questions about other sorts of positive epistemic status. Among other sorts of positive epistemic status, two of the most important would be *internal rationality* and *warrant*. The first has to do with the sort of doxastic response you make to the evidence that is available to you – the sorts of beliefs you do or do not form in response to that evidence. And here *evidence* includes not just other propositions that you believe (although it does include that) but also your current experience: the ways in which you are being appeared to, for example, when you look out at your backyard and your visual field is filled with that highly detailed and intricate pattern of light, color, and shape. (That is just one kind of experience; there is also, for example, *moral experience*: certain actions just seem right and others seem wrong.) And you are internally rational when your doxastic response to your evidence is appropriate or right. Well, when is such a response appropriate or right? The first thing to see is that what is involved here is not a matter of duty or obligation. It is instead, broadly speaking, a matter of health,

sanity, proper function. A doxastic response is appropriate or right when it is among the responses that could be made to that situation by someone who was completely rational – suffering from no cognitive dysfunction.

But now we can turn to our question: suppose I believe in the basic way that God loves me, or that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself; could I be internally rational in thus believing? Again, the answer seems easy: *of course* I could. For suppose again I have that rich interior spiritual life mentioned above: it seems to me that I am in communion with God, and that I see something of his marvelous glory and beauty, that I feel his love and his presence with me. Then (unless I've got some powerful defeater, and we need not hypothesize that I do) a response that involves believing that there is such a person is clearly perfectly sensible: there is nothing whatever pathological about it. Perhaps there is something pathological about having that sort of experience in the first place: that is as may be. But *given* the experience, there is nothing pathological in that doxastic response.

Finally, what about *warrant*, the last member of our trio? Warrant, we may say, is what separates knowledge from mere true belief. Warrant is the answer to Plato's question in the *Theaetetus*: What is it that must be added to true belief to get knowledge? Warrant is a name for that quantity or quality, whatever exactly it is. Well, what is warrant? Here I shall have to be brief and dogmatic, assuming a certain view as to what warrant is. (The same conclusion would result if we thought of warrant in the other presently plausible ways.) As I see it, then, the warrant enjoyed by a belief has to do with the status of the faculties or belief-producing processes or mechanisms that are responsible for the production of that belief. More exactly, a belief has warrant only when it is produced by cognitive faculties that are functioning properly (note the connection with internal rationality), in the sort of cognitive environment for which they have been designed (by God or evolution).

These are the first two conditions of warrant; there are two more. Some faculties or belief-producing processes, as far as we can see, have the production of true beliefs as their function: they are aimed at the production of true belief. Here we think of perception, memory, and the processes, whatever exactly they are, by virtue of which we know simple arithmetical and logical truths. But other belief-producing processes seem to be aimed at something other than true belief. For example, there is wishful thinking; the function of this mode of belief-production isn't the production of true belief, but of belief with some other virtue – perhaps belief that will enable you to carry on in this sad and difficult world of ours. There is also the alleged mechanism whereby women don't remember childbirth to be as painful as it actually is; perhaps this is aimed at willingness to have more children. Other belief-producing mechanisms might be aimed at the production of beliefs that permit and enhance friendship; a real friend will give you the benefit of the doubt and continue to believe in your honesty after a careful and objective look at the evidence would have dictated a reluctant change of mind. The third condition of warrant, then, is that it be produced by cognitive faculties or belief-producing processes that are aimed at the production of true belief (and not survival or psychological comfort). And the fourth and final condition is just that the process or faculty in question be *successfully* aimed at the production of true belief: there must be a high probability that a belief produced by the process in question (when it is functioning properly in the right kind of environment) will be true.

Well, then, *do* Christian and theistic belief meet these conditions? According to Sigmund Freud (1949) and Karl Marx (1964), they do not. The heart of Freud's criticism of religious belief (especially belief in God) is that religious belief is produced by the process of *wish-fulfillment* or wishful thinking, a process that is aimed at psychological comfort in the face of a natural world that seems indifferent or hostile. According to Freud, therefore, belief in God doesn't meet the third condition of warrant. And according to Marx, belief in God (and other religious belief) is produced by way of psychological malfunction on the part of people who live under conditions of societal malfunction; so it doesn't meet the first condition of warrant. If either Freud or Marx were correct, therefore, theistic belief would not have warrant; it wouldn't be produced by the right kind of faculty or belief-producing process (see Chapter 61, Naturalistic Explanations of Theistic Belief).

Of course neither Freud nor Marx gave any reason to *believe* these suggestions of theirs; they simply *announced* them. And in announcing them, they were really assuming that theistic belief is in fact false. For suppose theistic belief is true: then we human beings have been created by a loving God who would be interested in our knowing about him and would almost certainly have provided a way by which we could come to know him and know about him. He would therefore have created us in such a way that under the right conditions we would come to know him and know about him. Since many of us (again, assuming that theism is true) *do* in fact know him and know about him, the natural thing to think, surely, is that the processes or faculties by which these beliefs are formed are functioning properly in the sort of environment for which they were designed; further, they are successfully aimed at the production of true belief, i.e., those beliefs involved in knowing God and knowing something about him. If theistic belief is true, therefore, then in all probability it meets the conditions of warrant; on the other hand, if it is false, then in all probability it does not meet those conditions. So in simply announcing that theistic belief lacks warrant, Freud and Marx and their followers are simply assuming that theistic belief (and other religious belief) is in fact false.

Of course one who thinks theistic belief *true* (as do the Reformed epistemologists) will not follow Marx and Freud here; such a person will not have Marx and Freud's reason for thinking theistic belief without warrant. Instead, the Reformed epistemologist will point out that (in all probability) theistic belief has warrant if and only if it is true; since she thinks it is true, she will also think it has warrant, and has it in the basic way. Here she can't claim (as with justification) that it is just *obvious* that theistic belief has warrant; for it isn't just obvious that theism is true. Instead, she points out that theistic belief has warrant if and only if it is true; hence whether one thinks it has warrant will depend upon whether one thinks it true.

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## Evidentialism

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In their book *Evidentialism*, Earl Conee and Richard Feldman (2004) write that evidentialism is a theory of synchronic rationality, of what makes a person's belief at a given time a "rational" or "justified" one to hold at that time (p. 189). It holds that a belief that  $p$  is justified if (and only if) it is based on evidence which makes it "epistemically probable" that  $p$  is true (p. 100). Spelling this out involves the concept of a basic belief. A basic belief is one which seems to the subject (epistemically) probably true, but not (or not merely) for the reason that it is based on and made probable by his other beliefs. I believe that I now see a chair, but not merely for the reason that some other belief of mine (e.g., the belief that I always see a chair on a Monday morning) makes it probable. A "rightly" or "properly" basic belief is one which is probably true just because we have it (that is, the content of the belief, what is believed, is probably true just because we have that belief).

"Evidence" may be understood in many different ways. In one sense a person's evidence consists of those states of affairs readily accessible to that person. For example, a detective's evidence might be said to include the footprints and fingerprints which were to be found at the scene of the crime which he was investigating, whether or not he bothered to look at them or acquired true beliefs about their shape. In another sense, it consists of the sensory content of one's present experiences (e.g., a green patch in my visual field) and the propositional content of one's properly basic beliefs (including beliefs about that sensory content). In a narrower sense it consists solely of the content of one's properly basic beliefs. It is clearly a good thing to have a belief based on and rendered probable by evidence in any of these senses. But as our concern is with the rational response at a given time to the situation in which one finds oneself, evidence which one hasn't bothered to look at does not seem relevant. And since one can at a given time only respond to the sensory content of one's present experiences in virtue of one's beliefs about what that is, it would seem that it is only the latter (and not the former) which are relevant. Hence, if one has ten spots in front of one's eyes, but believes that there are only nine spots, it is only the rational response to the latter belief which is relevant to synchronic justification. (That one ought to have counted the spots more diligently would not affect one's present justification.) So, I suggest, an evidentialist should construe someone's evidence as encompassing no more than the content of their basic beliefs. But if there are any basic beliefs which the believer is not justified in



holding, their content can hardly count as evidence. So a typical evidentialist regards a believer's evidence as the content of all his properly basic beliefs.

But which beliefs are "properly basic"? Plantinga (in the previous entry in this *Companion*) defines "classical foundationalism" as the theory that only basic beliefs about the believer's mental life (e.g., "I am now thinking about philosophy") or "self-evident" beliefs (such as simple truths of arithmetic) are properly basic. In his earlier writing (Plantinga 1983, pp. 55–9), he gave a definition of classical foundationalism which also included as properly basic those beliefs "evident to the senses," that is beliefs about what one is now perceiving (e.g., "Here is a table" or "I see a table"). But, as Plantinga points out, we have many basic beliefs which seem to us properly basic which are not of these three kinds, for example, memory beliefs such as "I drank tea for breakfast this morning." And if we are right in supposing that those general beliefs about history or geography which so many of us have (e.g., that the earth is round and more than a few hundred years old, or that there was a Holocaust in the mid-twentieth century) are probably true, the class of properly basic beliefs will have to be much larger. For such beliefs are not probable because they are made probable by what we recall that we have observed ourselves, or what we recall reading in a particular book or some particular person telling us. (Normally we have forgotten just when we acquired these beliefs.) Rather, we take it for granted with respect to each such belief that "everyone knows that." And so the class of properly basic beliefs must include such beliefs. So which basic beliefs are not properly basic? It is hard to find any plausible reason for delimiting some particular sub-class of the class of basic beliefs as alone properly basic.

So I advocate a principle, which I call "the principle of credulity," that every basic belief is properly basic. The mere fact that one has a basic belief is reason for believing it to be true, and so in the absence of contrary evidence it is a justified belief. But a basic belief may be rendered improbable by all the believer's basic beliefs taken together, and then not be a justified belief. Suppose I have a basic belief *B* that I saw an iron ball floating on water, but I also have very many basic beliefs concerning separate occasions on which iron balls sank to the bottom of a tank of water. The latter beliefs make probable a theory that iron balls always sink to the bottom, which makes my basic belief *B* that I saw an iron ball floating no longer probable. Basic beliefs are held with different degrees of strength – I believe very strongly that I now see a desk, fairly strongly that today is Monday, and so on. The strength of a belief in a proposition is a matter of how probable the believer believes it to be. Probability is measured between 0 and 1. A person believes a proposition only if he believes it more probable than not (that is, he ascribes to it a probability greater than  $\frac{1}{2}$ ); but if he believes it very strongly, he believes it to be very much more probable than not (that is, to have a probability close to 1). And so I suggest the principle of credulity is to be construed more precisely as the principle that every basic belief is as probable as the believer believes it to be in virtue of the mere fact that he believes it to be thus probable. My iron ball example tacitly assumed that basic belief *B* was no stronger than any other of my basic beliefs. The lower the probability of a basic belief the less probable it makes other beliefs. By contrast, a very strong basic belief can render improbable a theory rendered probable by many weaker basic beliefs. That is why what we see with our own eyes may be more credible than what many people tell us.

In writing about beliefs being “probable,” I have been writing about them being “epistemically probable” in Conee and Feldman’s sense; I must now explain what I think they mean by this. Unfortunately there are no standard definitions for kinds of probability and related notions, and what one writer calls “epistemic probability” another writer will call “inductive probability” or “logical probability.” Here is my classification of kinds of probability.

There are, I suggest, three main kinds of probability – physical, statistical, and inductive. Physical probability is a measure of the extent to which nature has a propensity toward bringing about events. A possible event has a probability of 1 if and when it is predetermined to happen and a probability of 0 if and when it is predetermined not to happen. Probabilities intermediate between 1 and 0 measure the extent of the bias in nature toward the occurrence of an event. Statistical probability is a measure of the proportion of events of one kind in some class of events. The probability of an American having voted for George Bush in the 2004 election is just the proportion of Americans who did so vote. The class may be an actual class (as in this example) or a hypothetical class – the proportion of heads in a series of tosses of this coin if we were to toss it a trillion times (and to have a clear notion, we need to specify the conditions under which the toss would be made). Finally, there is inductive probability, which is a measure of the extent to which one proposition makes another proposition probable or likely to be true. A proposition  $p$  has a probability of 1 on evidence  $q$  if and only if given  $q$ ,  $p$  is certainly true; and a probability of 0 if and only if given  $q$ ,  $p$  is certainly false. Inductive probability may be either logical probability, which is probability by correct criteria, or subjective probability, which is probability by the subject’s own criteria. We all normally suppose that there are correct criteria (although perhaps rather imprecise ones) for what makes what probable – that such-and-such fossil evidence makes it probable that dinosaurs lived here; or that such-and-such clues make it probable that Brutus killed Caesar. And we all normally suppose that the way to discover what these criteria are is by reflecting on actual and possible examples of what makes what probable. But not everyone reaches exactly the same view about what these criteria are. (There is also a kind of inductive probability intermediate between the logical and the subjective, which I have discussed elsewhere and called “epistemic probability.” This is probability by correct criteria insofar as it lies within the capacity of the subject to calculate this. But I shall ignore this complexity in this short chapter. For fuller analysis of kinds of probability, see Swinburne 2001, ch. 3.)

The evidentialist’s “epistemic probability” is clearly an inductive probability, and it is most usually understood as “logical probability” in my sense. Conee and Feldman do not give any account of the criteria for what makes what probable; so, to fill out their understanding of evidentialism, I give my account. As well as the principle of credulity there is, I suggest, a principle of testimony, that evidence that someone has told you that so-and-so makes it as such probable that so-and-so. It remains probable unless the believer either has basic beliefs which make it improbable that the speaker normally tells the truth or was in a position to know so-and-so, or has basic beliefs which make so-and-so improbable for other reasons.

There are then criteria for constructing an explanatory hypothesis to explain our evidence in a wide sense that includes not just the content of our basic beliefs, but also what I may call our indirect evidence (provided by the testimony of others).

I suggest that an explanatory hypothesis (or theory) is rendered probable by evidence insofar as (1) the occurrence of the evidence is probable if the hypothesis is true and improbable if the hypothesis is false, (2) the hypothesis "fits in" with any "background evidence" (that is, it meshes with theories outside its scope which are rendered probable by their evidence), (3) the hypothesis is simple, and (4) the hypothesis has small scope. The scope of a theory is a matter of how much it purports to tell us about the world, in the extent and precision of its claims. (3) and (4) are features internal to a hypothesis, independent of its relation to evidence, and so determine its prior probability (its probability independent of the evidence). While the more the hypothesis claims, the more likely it is to be false (which is what the criterion of scope says), simplicity carries more weight than scope; scientists consider some theory of enormous scope (concerned with the whole universe) probable if it has a neat, relatively simple set of laws and satisfies the other criteria well. There may be no relevant background evidence, and then criterion (2) drops out. One such case is when a hypothesis has very large scope (purports to explain a vast amount) and so there is little if any evidence about matters beyond its scope. Among large-scale theories of equal scope, such as theism and rival accounts of why there is a universe of our kind, relative probability depends on criteria (1) and (3) alone; and so in the case of theories leading us to expect the evidence with the same probability (that is, satisfying criterion (1) equally well), on criterion (3) above. The better a hypothesis satisfies these criteria, the more probable it is that the hypothesis is true.

Suppose that we are investigating the burglary of a safe and we have two pieces of evidence: witnesses testify that they saw John at the scene of the burglary at the time it was committed, and money taken from the safe was found in John's house. A detective puts forward the hypothesis that John robbed the safe. Criterion (1) is well satisfied; it is probable that there would be this evidence if John robbed the safe, but not otherwise. But now suppose that there is background evidence supporting the theory that John has never previously committed a crime. Criterion (2) would not then be well satisfied. But the hypothesis that John robbed the safe is simpler than a hypothesis proposed by another detective that Harry (about whom there is background evidence that he is a regular safebreaker) robbed the safe, but the money was stolen from Harry by an unknown thief who hid it (unknown to John) in John's house. For this latter hypothesis postulates two separate unconnected actions (that of Harry and that of the unknown thief) which coincidentally bring about the same evidence as John's two connected actions of robbing the safe and hiding the money in his own house. (These latter actions are connected because the first makes the second quite probable.) So the new hypothesis does not satisfy criterion (3) as well as the original hypothesis, but it does satisfy criterion (2) better in postulating that the robbery was done by a known thief. The two hypotheses satisfy criterion (4) equally well, since they are both concerned only with the causes of the same evidence. They have to be compared with respect to how well they satisfy the other criteria overall; and on balance, I suggest the first hypothesis is rendered more probable by the evidence than is the second hypothesis.

Given my principles of credulity and testimony, and criteria such as I have outlined for the probability of an explanatory hypothesis, it follows that a belief that there is a God would be justified if the believer has a strong basic belief that there is a God (e.g., as a result of a deep religious experience apparently of the presence of God) which is

not rendered improbable by his other basic beliefs taken together. It would also be justified if his belief is based on other people (e.g., the local priest) telling him that there is a God, again so long as the belief is not rendered improbable by his other basic beliefs (e.g., different people telling him that there is no God). But in the modern world many people need their belief that there is a God to be based on and made probable by publicly observable evidence, if it is to be justified in the evidentialist sense; producing arguments to show that that belief is rendered probable by public evidence, and so providing a basis for that belief, is doing what is called “natural theology” (see Chapter 21, Natural Theology). These arguments typically take off from such evidence as that there is a physical universe, that it behaves in the totally regular way described by “laws of nature,” that these laws are fine-tuned to produce human bodies, that humans are conscious beings, etc. Proponents of natural theology then claim that this evidence renders the hypothesis that there is a God probable by criteria of the kind which I have been discussing (e.g., because the hypothesis is a very simple hypothesis which makes it probable that there would be this evidence, when it would be very improbable that there would be this evidence if the hypothesis is false). And arguments are needed to show that the hypothesis remains probable despite the evidence that the world contains much suffering (see Chapter 59, The Evidential Problem of Evil). Arguments of this kind are discussed elsewhere in this *Companion* (see Part 5, The Justification of Theistic Belief, especially Chapter 44, Teleological and Design Arguments; and Chapter 49, Cumulative Cases; these last two entries discuss the specific sort of probabilistic evidence for theism referred to above). The more detailed beliefs of particular religions, such as the Christian belief that Jesus was God, might also be justified in any of these three ways mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph. But again I suggest that in the modern world most people need arguments which take off from publicly available evidence – in this case historical evidence (for example about the life and teaching of Jesus, and the testimony of witnesses about his resurrection) – and maintain that the more detailed belief is rendered probable by that evidence (see Chapter 47, Miracles).

Plantinga (Chapter 79, Reformed Epistemology) characterizes evidentialism about religious belief as the claim that “belief in God is rationally acceptable if and only if there is adequate evidence in the form of good arguments for it,” where “good arguments” are arguments which show that evidence (in the sense delineated above) makes that belief probable. But evidentialism, as I have defined it and it is more usually understood, about religious belief or any other topic, requires only “adequate evidence,” not “adequate evidence in the form of good arguments.” Properly basic beliefs constitute good evidence and do not require further evidence for their justification; and, given the principle of credulity, all basic beliefs are properly basic. So it is certainly possible that someone can have a properly basic belief that there is a God, sufficiently strong so as not to be rendered improbable by their other beliefs. The evidentialist is therefore happy to endorse the claim of Reformed epistemology that this is possible. But, I repeat, I do not think that many people in the modern world have a basic belief that there is a God, let alone a basic belief that Jesus is God, sufficiently strong so as not to need support from public evidence.

Being justified in this evidentialist sense is, I explained, a matter of having a belief based on and rendered probable by the evidence currently available. Yet insofar as the issue is an important one, it is a good thing to check whether our belief is really rendered

probable by our current evidence. That involves reflecting on whether we are using the correct criteria for assessing that evidence, and whether we have applied them correctly. And it is also a good thing to try to get a better justified belief on the issue concerned. This involves looking for more relevant evidence, because a larger collection of evidence may make either the original belief or a contrary belief more probable than was the original belief on the original evidence. It may well be a duty to check up on the justification of one's present belief about whether or not there is a God, and to look for more relevant evidence.

Evidentialism is an internalist theory in that it makes the justification of a belief depend on things accessible to introspection (one's other beliefs and the criteria for what makes what probable). The obvious alternative to evidentialism is some externalist theory, which makes the justification of a belief depend on whether it was brought about by the right kind of process – whether or not the believer is aware of what that process is and whether it is of the right kind. The most common form of externalism is reliabilism, which holds that the right kind of process is a reliable process. A reliable process is one which yields mostly true beliefs; and so a process for which the statistical probability (see the earlier definition) of a belief being true is greater than  $\frac{1}{2}$ . For example, my belief that there is a desk in front of me was brought about by the visual process (light rays landing on my eyes causing a disturbance in the optic nerve causing a brain state causing the belief). A reliabilist holds that this belief is justified if and only if beliefs produced by a process of this type are mostly true; although he usually adds a qualification, “subject to defeaters.” There is, however, a major problem for the reliabilist, known as the “generality problem” about what constitutes the type to which this particular process belongs (see Conee and Feldman 2004, ch. 6). Is it the type of beliefs caused by vision in all people, beliefs caused by vision in the believer, beliefs caused by vision in the believer in good light, or what? According to the type to which we consider the process of producing a particular belief to belong, we get different answers to whether that belief is justified. For example, if I am almost blind and we consider that my particular belief that there is a desk in front of me is justified if and only if most beliefs caused by vision in all people are true, then my belief will be justified; but not if we consider that its justification depends on whether most of my beliefs produced by vision are true. The reliabilist qualification “subject to defeaters” seems often to be understood in an internalist sense; a believer has a defeater to a particular belief produced in the reliable way if he has a properly basic belief or a belief rendered logically probable thereby which makes it improbable that that particular belief is true.

While William Alston (1991) defends a reliabilist theory of the “justification” of religious belief, Plantinga is primarily concerned with “knowledge” of God and his properties and actions. So he defines a notion of “warrant” as that quality enough of which turns a true belief into knowledge. He gives this four-part externalist account of warrant (Plantinga 1993, p. 194; see also Chapter 79, *Reformed Epistemology*):

A belief has warrant (subject to defeaters) if and only if: (1) it is produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly (that is in the way their creator designed them to function), (2) in a cognitive environment sufficiently similar to that for which the faculties were designed, (3) according to a design plan aimed at the production of true beliefs, when (4) there is a high statistical probability of such beliefs being true.



A major problem with this definition is that while it has a clear meaning if God created our cognitive faculties, it does not if some blind process (such as evolution, which Plantinga considers the main alternative to God) created them. For a blind process did not in any sense design anything to function at all, let alone in a certain environment according to a design plan. Designing is an intentional action, something that only a conscious being can do. So (1), (2), and (3) have no application, which leaves us only with (4), which is simple reliabilism with its generality problem. Plantinga, however, thinks that God created our faculties, and so “if Christian belief is true, it very likely does have warrant” (Plantinga 2000, p. 498).

Even if knowledge is more worth having than true belief, it is not obvious that it is more worth having than justified true belief (where “justified” is understood in the evidentialist way analyzed earlier); and, even if it is, there are other analyses of knowledge which do not involve an externalist kind of “warrant.” For the major trouble with all externalist kinds of justification or warrant is that you cannot check up on the processes of belief production which they commend to see whether those processes are reliable (let alone produced by God) unless you use evidence from the past which makes it probable that they are reliable. But that involves using internalist criteria for when evidence makes that sort of conclusion probable. And as with “defeaters,” if one admits that there are correct criteria of logical probability, why not use them all the time? And since you cannot check up on whether some process is reliable (or produced by God), you cannot set about getting a better justified belief. And further, when, as Plantinga (2000, ch. 6) suggests, there is a special process in us which produces the belief that there is a God (the *sensus divinitatis*) and another process (“the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit”) which produces particularly Christian beliefs, one couldn’t check up on whether our beliefs are produced by this process (and so are reliable) without first establishing in some other (e.g., evidentialist) way that there is probably a God. But since Plantinga has little confidence in natural theology, he holds that “it is beyond the competence of philosophy” to show that Christian beliefs are true (Plantinga 2000, p. 499).

Generally, though it may be good to have beliefs which are justified or warranted in an externalist sense, since one cannot do anything to get better justified or warranted beliefs, there is not much point in bothering about whether our beliefs are thus justified. But we do normally think that we can improve the justification or warrant of our beliefs, as the internalist claims that we can; and since the only way in which we can acquire better justified beliefs is by using internalist criteria, it is justification of this kind that we should seek. And there is no reason to suppose that it cannot be had for the belief that there is a God, or alternatively for the belief that there is no God, and for more detailed theological beliefs or alternatives to them.

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## Feminism

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Analytic philosophy of religion has so far shown a marked (if largely silent) resistance to feminist reflection of any sort. Its hostility to feminist *theology* (evidenced in a few scattered articles) is easily comprehensible, granted the initial genesis of that movement in the early 1970s from American “liberal” and “constructivist” theology (to which most analytic philosophers of religion are opposed on other grounds), the biblical and doctrinal conservatism that characterizes analytic philosophy of religion as a whole, and the relative lack of philosophical acuity displayed in much first-wave feminist theology. It will not, however, be the goal of this chapter to survey types of feminist theology. Rather the focus will be on philosophy of religion’s more puzzling avoidance of the sophisticated work done in recent years in feminist *philosophy* (for useful surveys, see Grimshaw 1986; Rooney 1994). If taken seriously by philosophers of religion, this could have far-reaching implications for their fundamental assumptions and preoccupations; it will be the task here to sketch out these implications in a preliminary form. It will be suggested that the central place accorded in much analytic philosophy of religion to what feminists call the “generic male” (i.e., the privileged male subject posing as a sexless individual of universal instantiation) results in the sidelining not only of issues important to feminism, but also – ironically – of rich spiritual options from the Christian tradition.

### The “Generic Male” and the Problem of Evil

There is a relative dearth of literature in analytic philosophy of religion on the concept of “self” in *all* its dimensions; attention is more commonly focused on specific issues such as the mind/body problem. The discussion of free will, however, is richly developed on account of the crucial theodicy questions raised by the problem of evil (see Chapter 58, The Logical Problem of Evil; and Chapter 59, The Evidential Problem of Evil). Indeed one could argue that whatever solution the philosopher of religion proposes to this most pressing of contemporary religious questions, this will deeply affect the rest of the accompanying theological and philosophical system. The dominance of an “incompatibilist” view of freedom (in service of a “free will defense” on the problem of evil) is a striking feature of current analytic philosophy of religion – the more surprising, perhaps,

when enunciated by those otherwise staunchly committed to the defense of Calvinism. The sovereign, *unconditioned* freedom of the individual to do evil (as well as good), and thereby to effect a temporary evasion even of divine conditioning, is deemed by many contemporary philosophers of religion to be the only acceptable first plank in a convincing solution to the problem of evil.

But it is here that feminist critiques of the “generic male” may be particularly telling, and they may provide important complements (strange as this may seem) to the theological objections to incompatibilism from the Thomist or Calvinist camps. Feminist philosophers point here, first, to the historical *specificity* of the visions of “autonomy” spawned by the Enlightenment, and the conditionings, relationships, and dependencies – not least those on wife and family – that go unmentioned in these accounts, whilst also being taken for granted in them (see Lloyd 1984). Thus in Enlightenment discussions, woman – the invisible “other” supposedly included under the “generic” autonomous male – turns out, in her occasional moments of explicit recognition, actually to be in need of lengthy education before she can enjoy the fruits of Enlightenment “freedom” (so Immanuel Kant), though she may meanwhile pursue a vocation as “cushion” for her husband against the slings and arrows of free (male) political exchange (so Thomas Carlyle).

One may ask whether these Enlightenment conceptions of “autonomy” continue to infect – albeit unconsciously – the incompatibilist vision of freedom promulgated by many philosophers of religion (including some distinguished women philosophers) in response to the problem of evil. What difference would it make if this were acknowledged? It would, for a start, make it impossible for the promulgators of the “free will defense” to proceed as if incompatibilism were unproblematic in either gender or class terms (quite apart from its more technical philosophical ramifications). When it is said that it is “good that an agent should have ... power over the universe, the power to determine whether the morally good will prevail,” and that “a creator has reason to allow him the opportunity to do so, to allow him through right choices to grow in freedom and morally relevant knowledge until he becomes as the angels” (Swinburne 1991, pp. 158–9), a feminist may appropriately inquire whether this presumes on the part of the (male) agent a particular level of education, political freedom, and financial independence. (And since women only occasionally appear in Richard Swinburne’s narrative on the importance of “man’s” free will, it is instructive to note what *they* are doing: as minimally necessary for the act of conception [p. 187], as hapless victims of other men’s seductive purposes [p. 192], or as desire-inducing distractors from the monogamous path [p. 158].) Philosophers of religion are not accustomed to reading such “subtext”; one implication of an engagement with feminist philosophy would be to raise such gendered material to consciousness.

Furthermore, feminist philosophers of both Anglo-American and Continental background have entered into revealing (and critical) debate with Sigmund Freud and his various intellectual descendants. In so doing they have inquired about the childhood development of “autonomous” behavior and its relation to maternal dependence. If this development is in some sense gender-specific (involving a more fundamental repudiation of the mother in the case of male children), then intriguing questions are raised about how philosophical notions of free will relate to this basic familial context, and whether they, too, are covertly “male.” In the work of French feminism (strongly

influenced by Jacques Lacan) a more radical suggestion is proposed: that even the child's entry into the linguistic realm constitutes a repression of a primal "feminine" creativity associated with the maternal identification of the breast-feeding phase (so Julia Kristeva). This may seem far removed from analytic philosophy of religion's concern with the free will defense: yet a confluence of these debates could have considerable import. If it could be argued that an incompatibilist vision of freedom is unconsciously motivated by rejection of the mother (and everything she symbolizes: dependency, relationship, affectivity, bodiliness, emergent sexuality), then it is hardly surprising that it can also be resistant, in a theological context, to a notion of God as matrix – as sustaining conditioner of all that we are and do (even of acts of compatibilist freedom). As Swinburne puts it in a related context (1991, p. 212), he would want to avoid a circumstance in which "God would be too close for [men] to work things out for themselves." It is left, then, to the staiders defenders of Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin to propose a determinism less repudiating of God's "closeness."

### The Concept of God and Feminist Critique

It is not so surprising, then, to note in analytic philosophy of religion a striking tendency to image God as a magnified version of the *human* "unmoved mover" (Roderick M. Chisholm) of incompatibilist freedom, an "individual" of unrivaled power and autonomy who takes on the traditional attributes of classical theism, but more revealingly mirrors a (masculinist) vision of self specific to the Enlightenment. Such a predilection becomes evident when – according to some exponents – the traditional attributes (e.g., Omniscience, see Chapter 28) have to be modified to accommodate the indeterminism of this privileged vision of human freedom (see Chapter 56, Foreknowledge and Human Freedom); or the alternative view of divine-human relations (some form of determinism) is castigated as mere "puppetry" or "ventriloquism." To a feminist analysis, the dominance of such images of negative control in this debate bespeak a more fundamental failure to conceive of divine-human relations in anything other than competitive terms (where one "individual" either repressively dominates the other or else withdraws to make space for the other's autonomy). What is palpably missing is a sustained or positive reflection on the nurturing and all-encompassing dimensions of divine love – gendered metaphors that have well-known instantiations in the history of Christian theology and spirituality (e.g., Anselm, Julian of Norwich) but do not characteristically leap to the forefront of the analytic philosopher's imagination. In one striking recent counter-instance to this rule, Eleonore Stump (1994) can speak of a solution to the problem of evil in terms of the recognition of the "*mothering* guidance of God" (p. 242) superseding the ostensibly overwhelming presence of evil in the world. (For discussion of another counter-instance, see J. L. Schellenberg's description of his own work in Chapter 60, Divine Hiddenness.) That Stump can come to this conclusion without any hint of acknowledgement of feminist influence is, however, itself remarkable.

Other signs of "masculinist" visions of God in analytic philosophy of religion cracking under their own weight may be detected in recent discussions of the Trinity and the Incarnation. The lack of integration between analytic work on the arguments for the

existence of God and more recent defenses of Trinitarianism (on rational, not revelatory, grounds) witnesses to this. In the discussion about the arguments, little or nothing is said about the relational and internally complex nature of the Christian God; on the contrary, a great deal of play is made of the principle of simplicity (see again Swinburne 1991). That the divine “individual” established as existent by these arguments is then joined by two other “Gods” (so Swinburne, in more recent work) suggests a covert identification of the former with the “Father” (once again a decidedly non-Thomistic maneuver) and creates strain in dealing with the application of the simplicity principle. A feminist analysis of these developments would point to the failure to write divine *relationship* into the initial case for God’s existence. Instead, a whiff of anti-Trinitarian deism still tends to hang over the discussion of the arguments, such that the divine monad so established then needs to mount a new foray to the created world (according to one version of the Incarnation) in order to re-establish contact with the human family at all. Is this once more (in subtext) the disassociated “Father” of post-Enlightenment individualism? It is revealing that enormous logical rigor has been applied by analytic philosophers of religion of late to decrying the possibility of a contemporary philosophical defense of Western “Augustinian” Trinitarianism (where priority is given to the unity-in-relationship of the divine triad). The Eastern “Cappadocian” approach is preferred on account of its (purported) maintenance of “individual” identity for the “persons” and thus its greater coherence. In this, analytic philosophy of religion again displays a predilection for a certain vision of the self spawned long after the fourth century, and in general it reveals a “masculinist” lack of imagination to conceive of inner-Trinitarian loving exchange in anything other than extrinsic or contractual terms. There is a notable failure in developing models of trans-“individual” identity. Nonetheless, that “relationships” of (divine) “equals” are now on the agenda at all marks a minor advance in the discourse toward feminist ethical and theological concerns.

The “masculinism” that infects discussions of the Incarnation in recent philosophy of religion is more subtly pervasive. It is once again the way that a particular *relationship* is construed that is significant here, in this case the vital “hypostatic” unity of the divinity and humanity of Christ. The favored model for their interaction (tellingly, since the force of the unconscious is so rarely acknowledged in analytic philosophy of religion) is the power of the unconscious over the conscious, as in the Freudian “divided mind.” However, this is not a signal that a full range of Freudian themes on sexuality and the unconscious is now entering into discussion (something that feminists would welcome, if not uncritically). On the contrary, one point of the analogy is to demonstrate how one may *maintain* a libertarian view of human freedom in Christ whilst simultaneously promoting a vision of total divine *control* – as if Christ had constraining electrodes implanted in his skull to prevent possible lapses from sinlessness (so Thomas V. Morris, utilizing a thought experiment of Harry Frankfurt). Encoded here is a strange combination of semi-recognition of the potential importance of Freud for philosophical reflection on the divine and the human – the free and the un-free – and a stolid refusal to see in the narrative of Christ’s life and death any *upsetting* of stereotypical (gendered) ideas about “power” and “weakness,” “control” and “loss of control.” Again, a feminist analysis of these Christological debates can reveal how certain favored (masculinist) “intuition pumps” restricted the range of theological options from the outset (see Coakley 1996).

## Feminism and Religious Epistemology

Arguably the most creative area of development in recent philosophy of religion has been that of epistemology, especially in its relation to "religious experience" (see Chapter 48, Religious Experience; Chapter 79, Reformed Epistemology; and Chapter 83, Philosophical Reflection on Mysticism). But the last decade has also seen the emergence of sophisticated work in feminist epistemology (see, e.g., Code 1992, and the essays in Alcoff and Potter 1993) – a development wholly ignored in the debates of analytic philosophy of religion, despite the shared impact on both fields of the collapse of "classical foundationalism." Feminist epistemologists of different schools and philosophical persuasions have presented a range of alternatives, all of them stressing the political, racial, and gendered specificity of the privileged "knower" in mainstream epistemology. To ask "*who knows*" may, first, be the demand to *extend* an empiricist epistemology to include "knowers" previously excluded; as such, this option represents an advance in empirical "objectivity," not its demise. Alternatively, and second, it may involve a turn to "standpoint epistemology," stressing the socially constructed nature of the knowing subject and its partiality of vision (though not necessarily succumbing in all respect to postmodern relativism). Third, and rather differently, as in certain forms of French feminism, it may appeal to an *intrinsically* gendered form of "knowing" that is subversive of "male" rationality *tout court*.

If any of these feminist approaches were to be brought into critical play with analytic philosophy of religion's recent discussions of "religious experience," some interesting insights and new avenues of reflection might emerge. In the first place, it could be suggested that the current intensity of philosophical discussion in this area represents (albeit unconsciously) a heroic attempt to give *cognitive* and *justificatory* significance to an area which has traditionally been sidelined as "private" and "subjective," associated with intensified affectivity and expression in sexual metaphor, and in which women have "starred" as sites of divine intimacy. As such, the argument from religious experience represents a kind of "subjective" surd in the "cumulative case" for theism (see Swinburne 1991, ch. 13) and needs the crucial appeals to "testimony" and "credulity" to give it public cogency. A feminist critic might therefore ask whether this interest in "experiential" intimacy with God is not an intrinsically gendered matter – a move by masculinist philosophy of religion to appropriate the "feminine" power of "mystical" insight and simultaneously to adjust its form to meet the standards of an already-assumed rationality. (Teresa of Avila is the centerpiece of many recent philosophical analyses of "religious experience"; the fact that she was a *woman* mystic confronting male skepticism and disapproval in particular historical and political circumstances is noted by none of them.) Second, the crucial issue of "whose testimony, what credulity?" is a pressing one when seen through a feminist lens (see Jantzen 1994). If the veracity of appeals to "religious experience" ultimately resides in some primary acceptance of Reidian "credulity," then it is pertinent to ask whether *anyone's* credulity (women's, children's, illiterates?) will do. Bringing "religious experience" to the bar of rational "justification" may thus appear as the modern counterpart of the male confessor's hold over the medieval female saint's theological status and credibility. In both, the danger is ultimately one of reductive loss; in the case of contemporary philosophy of religion



(for all its epistemological finesse) this loss resides in failing to accept the challenge to develop an *expanded* notion of the epistemic subject suggested by the literature of the great “mystics” – one in which affectivity is not subordinated, nor sexual metaphor derided as “smut,” nor dark “unknowing” seen as a threat to rationality’s stability. The acknowledgement that these latter issues are themselves “gendered” would be the first step in such an advance; the further unraveling of the gendered “standpoints” concealed in the “doxastic practices” (William Alston) of Christian devotion would be another – and very complex – task.

There is much work to be done – both critical and constructive – in feminist philosophy of religion.

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## Philosophical Reflection on Revelation and Scripture

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### Historical Background

Throughout the history of Christian thought, scripture and revelation have been Siamese twins; while they are logically distinct notions, they have been inseparable as actual entities. The crucial debates related to them have invariably centered on how to distinguish and connect them at the same time. The issue has been an epistemic one, for the primary concern has been to develop an account of the place of scripture and revelation in knowledge of God. Thus the very idea of revelation and the very idea of a canon of scripture have been taken to be the equivalent of a criterion of theological truth. From the medieval period until the virtual collapse of both notions in the recent past this has been the conventional construal.

While scripture has been implicated in such epistemological debates, there is nothing remotely epistemic in the bare idea of sacred scripture. Scripture denotes simply a collection of sacred writings. The idea of a canon is more complex. Originally "canon" could mean either a list or a measuring line. Both meanings fit the patristic usage. Yet while the Church over time agreed officially on the books to be used in worship, it never agreed to any particular theory of scripture or of divine revelation. Diverse views on both, represented most clearly by diverse views on divine inspiration, were allowed. Equally, radically diverse views on the epistemology of theology were tolerated; there was no canonical or agreed account of how one knew that one knew God, even though there were very substantial proposals available on this topic in the teachers of the Church.

The matter took a radically new twist in the work of Thomas Aquinas. What had been an informal position in the early Fathers was relocated in a sophisticated account of theology as *scientia* ingeniously derived from Aristotle. In this analysis the propositions of scripture became the premises of a deductive science secured as true by the fact that they were spoken by God. All the teachings of the Church were taken as derivable from scripture, a position exploited brilliantly by the Reformers in their struggle with Rome. The Council of Trent countered the *sola scriptura* of the Reformers by rejecting a two-sources doctrine of authority, yet advocating a doctrine of divine dictation for both scripture and tradition. The nuances of the Tridentine position were often lost in the fierce polemical debates of the period. Underneath these there was amazing

consensus at two points. Scripture should be seen primarily in epistemic categories as a norm of truth. The guarantee of this norm was that scripture was spoken or dictated by God.

These claims in turn generated the question of how one knew that Christian scripture rather than, say, the Qur'an was the Word of God. Aquinas dealt with this in terms of miracle and prophecy; John Calvin, while he did not reject arguments concerning the marvelous nature of scripture, appealed to the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. Even then, it was not clear whether this was an appeal to religious experience or to a kind of mystical revelation within. Counter-Reformation polemicists quickly seized on the subjectivism lurking in appeal to the inner witness or happily deployed it themselves. The outcome was a hopeless impasse. Both sides developed an exclusive foundationalism in the epistemology of theology which rested on the same ultimate ground, inner experience of the Spirit, but which led to radically contradictory conclusions. Alternatively, they appealed to competing foundations, scripture or the *magisterium* of the Church speaking infallibly through the pope, beyond which one could not proceed. By this time the alternative development of patristic Christianity embodied in the East was not really in on the conversation.

The Cartesian revolution can legitimately be seen as, in part, a brilliant attempt to resolve the impasse created by the clash of foundationalisms in the Church in the West. Through the *cogito ergo sum* René Descartes sought to clear away contested opinion and make room for a foundation which would withstand even the deceptive wiles of the devil. This foundation, marked by clarity, distinctness, and universality, became the base for a new foundationalism divorced from all sectarian associations. By this time scripture and revelation had dropped out of the picture and the field of epistemology became more and more a subdiscipline within philosophy (see Chapter 12, Early Modern Philosophical Theology on the Continent).

This trend was continued in John Locke, who replaced Descartes' appeal to reason with an appeal to the "ideas" derived from sense experience. While Locke was in many ways a thoroughly conventional Protestant who believed in scripture and divine revelation, he insisted that reason, now understood as sense experience, was the last rule and guide in everything. Propositions derived from revelation could be above reason but they could not be contrary to reason. Moreover, revelation itself must be secured by the presence of miracles (see Chapter 47, Miracles). Belief in the God of miracles was in turn secured by natural theology (see Chapter 21, Natural Theology). The result was a two-stage apologetic strategy. One attained belief in God by means of natural theology; one arrived at distinctive Christian beliefs, like the immortality of the soul, by means of divine revelation guaranteed by miracle and prophecy. Scripture came into this picture as the medium of divine revelation conceived principally as a form of divine communication.

David Hume demolished this neat and attractive package with his attack on natural theology and miracle. By now the canonical heritage of the Church had been reduced to scripture and interpreted as a criterion of truth, that is, as an item in epistemology. For Protestants, Hume's attack precipitated a crisis which has never been satisfactorily resolved. They have oscillated between the search for a new foundation, best represented by Friedrich Schleiermacher's appeal to religious experience (see Chapter 48, Religious Experience), and the reassertion of the rights of divine revelation,

best represented by the great Princeton theologians of the nineteenth century and by Karl Barth in the twentieth. In Schleiermacher the concept of revelation did no epistemic work, and scripture became a norm not of truth but of Christian identity. In the Princeton tradition scripture was treated as divine revelation *simpliciter*, while Barth saw it as a unique witness to revelation. The Princeton theologians and Barth interpreted religious experience as a subjective snare; the former were passionately committed to natural theology, while Barth rejected it vehemently on theological grounds. The crucial point to grasp about this tangled journey is that Protestantism found itself constantly beholden to the fortunes of epistemology in the culture. The arrival of feminist and other forms of liberation theology have not altered this situation. Thus feminist theology began with the epistemic slogans of liberal Protestants in its appeal to women's experience but is now drawn into postmodernist construals of rationality, truth, and knowledge (see Chapter 81, Feminism).

For those who remained committed to divine revelation as a source of truth, the great problem of the last two centuries has been how to reconcile this move with the application of historical criticism to the content of Christian scripture. Once scripture was construed primarily as spoken and dictated by God, some doctrine of inerrancy was inevitable. The problem then arose of how to square this with contrary observations derived from scientific and historical investigations of reality. Aquinas resolved this dilemma by appeal to God's intentions as the author of scripture. His doctrine of inerrancy, which was pivotal for his account of theology as *scientia*, could be kept intact by positing a divine meaning in the text compatible with the findings of science and history. However, the very idea of a divine meaning behind the text became suspect in all forms of historical investigation which posited merely human meanings in the text. Moreover, Hume's critique of miracles as necessarily devoid of positive evidence was extended by Ernest Troeltsch in his deployment of criticism, correlation, and analogy to mount a devastating attack on the whole idea of divine intervention in history. This cut radically into the whole fabric of scripture and canonical tradition and evoked Rudolf Bultmann's famous plan of demythologizing as a way out of the excruciating problems engendered by the logic of historical inquiry. In this case the content of Christianity was reduced to anthropological proposals related to the doctrine of justification, scripture was effectively reduced to a historically reconstructed *kerygma* which left no room for divine intervention, and the concept of revelation went idling. Recent work on the Jesus of history in the Jesus Seminar and postmodern construal of historical investigation have served to raise again disputes about the logic of historical investigation and the problem of relating divine revelation to the historical study of scripture.

## Current Trends

In the meantime, philosophers of religion have been exploring new ways of thinking about the whole range of topics related to epistemology in general and the epistemology of Christian theism in particular. The stimulus for these developments has been four-fold: the demise of the positivist critique of religious language (see Chapter 54, The Verificationist Challenge); the collapse of classical foundationalism; a fresh encounter with Islam in the West; and the exploration of new ways of thinking about perception,

rationality, justification, and knowledge. In addition, deep dissatisfaction with the content and confusion of contemporary theology has driven philosophers to explore afresh the topic of divine revelation and the traditional *loci* of Christian theology. Consequently any neat distinction between philosophy and theology has collapsed. As in the case of Aquinas, it is correct to see, for example, the work of Richard Swinburne as simultaneously philosophical and theological. This is an extraordinary development which few would have envisaged a generation ago and which has yet to be absorbed into the modern theological curriculum. Equally fascinating is the deployment of philosophical skills to the whole range of topics in systematic theology, e.g. the Trinity. It is only a matter of time before we shall see the the invention of analytic theology as a new vision for theology proper.

The difficulties encountered in medieval and modern construals of scripture coupled with the emergence of new work in epistemology call for a different approach to the construal of Christian scripture and revelation. Christian scripture and canon, when seen from the point of view of their origins, are not epistemic concepts. In fact scripture was but one element in a complex and rich canonical heritage which was developed by the Church. Over the same time there arose a canon of scripture, a rule of faith or creed, a standard liturgy, a canon of teachers, a normative pattern of iconography, a canon of councils, a standard set of sacraments and other religious rites, a network of flexible regulations related to the daily life of the Church, and an agreed form of episcopal oversight. These were intended to function together to initiate people into the kingdom of God. They constituted means whereby one was granted salvation through humility, repentance, and faith. Equally, they were gifts of the Holy Spirit which could only be received through immersion in the life of the Spirit. Their intention was to create in the believer the mind of Christ, to make one divine, and to bring one into the life of the Triune God. While they indeed mediated genuine knowledge of God, they brought one face to face with an ultimate mystery which could never be expressed in any form of human knowledge or language.

This canonical heritage is best seen in soteriological categories. Through the activity of God, it is a means of healing and restoration. This healing does not take place without knowledge of and about God, but the purpose of the canonical heritage is not to provide an epistemology of theology. At the level of epistemology what we have in the canonical heritage are various epistemic suggestions and proposals about knowledge of God which lie in wait for further analysis and development. These appear most conspicuously in scripture and in the writings of the canonical teachers of the Church. Hence we might say that the Church indirectly canonized various epistemic suggestions or ideas, like the importance of divine speaking and the apophatic character of knowledge of God, but it very carefully kept these subordinate to its primary commitments to scripture, creed, sacraments, liturgy, iconography, and the like. Western Christianity injured this delicate balance by epistemizing the canonical life of the Church when it transposed it into such items as scripture, tradition, teaching *magisterium*, and papal infallibility in order to further its epistemic interests. Hence it took what was marginal in the canonical heritage and made it constitutive and central. In so doing it also created the seedbed for the classical foundationalism which became a hallmark of the Enlightenment. The latter was the creation of Christian intellectuals who secularized the working of the Holy Spirit and relocated the foundations of knowledge in reason

and experience as opposed to scripture and tradition. Anglicans and United Methodists confusedly tried to develop sophisticated syntheses of reason and experience with scripture and tradition.

Once the original and historic nature of the canonical heritage is acknowledged, we are liberated to pursue the epistemic suggestions of that heritage with freedom and dexterity. Hence we can explore the polymorphous nature of the concept of divine revelation, for revelation can rightly be seen to involve everything from God's action in creation to encounters with the divine mystery in the life to come. In between, we can examine divine revelation in God's speaking to the prophets in various ways, the unique unveiling of God in the Incarnation, and the ongoing acts of divine speaking in the Church and in the life of the individual. So used, the concept of revelation is the epistemic equivalent of the concept of witness or testimony in jurisprudence. Hence it cannot be used to resolve deeper questions about the reliability of intuition, reason, memory, sense experience, and the like. These questions have to be pursued in their own right. Equally, the concept of revelation cannot dispose of deep questions about how to articulate the meaning and nature of rationality, truth, justification, and knowledge.

### New Directions

An especially interesting issue is that of relating revelation to religious experience and to various arguments for the existence of God. It is relatively easy to assimilate revelation to religious experience, for certain kinds of revelation clearly are given in experience, like the divine promise or warning given to a prophet. Yet not all revelation can be reduced to religious experience, for in many cases of religious experience what is at stake is an encounter with the being of God rather than any action or message of God. Moreover, it is possible to move from an appeal to natural theology to an appeal to special revelation in order to support the full contours of Christian theism. In this case we have a kind of natural theology from below completed by a revealed theology from above. However, it is also possible to start with special revelation and then move to the deployment of all sorts of arguments for Christian theism. The latter is a kind of natural theology not far below the thought of Aquinas in logical structure.

None of these positions would appear to do full justice to the kind of certainty often found among the saints and martyrs of the Christian tradition, nor to the claims of certitude found among a host of ordinary believers. This has led at times to the idea of properly basic beliefs, applied characteristically to the tenets of theism, but also deployed occasionally to belief in special revelation and to the personal status of the individual before God as forgiven and accepted in Christ. It has also led to claims of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit which have removed it from its function of validating the canon of scripture and relocated it in the sphere of perception of the divine or some other favored epistemic context (see Chapter 79, *Reformed Epistemology*.) This constitutes an arena of epistemological investigation which is as yet underdeveloped. Careful exploration of the writings of the canonized theologians of the East, most especially of Simeon the New Theologian, could prove to be exceptionally fruitful when read in the light of the range of epistemic possibilities recently articulated. Paul Moser has already



shown how productive this line can be when brought to bear on the neglected swathes of scripture and of Western theology.

Another issue constantly lurking below the surface is the extent to which discernment of divine revelation depends on the healing of our cognitive capacities. Scripture and tradition repeatedly attribute belief and faith to the working of the Holy Spirit. As Paul says, "No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13). Because of the obsession with internalist construals of justification, these matters have never been given the epistemic attention they deserve, as they are often dismissed as forms of emotionalism, enthusiasm, and subjectivism. Recent work in reliabilism and virtue theories of knowledge could shed invaluable light on these crucial canonical suggestions related to revelation and epistemology. This work needs to be integrated with the insights of ascetic theology on the role of repentance and purification (see Chapter 73, Atonement, Justification, and Sanctification), of ascent and participation, in coming to a knowledge of God. The notion of spiritual practices as epistemic practices deserves attention, as does the role of God in creating and healing our cognitive abilities. We also need to heed the insights of social epistemology. These are precisely the possibilities opened up by the breakdown of classical foundationalism over the last generation.

What is now possible is a fresh appropriation of the canonical clarity and epistemic modesty of the patristic tradition. Scripture is a crucial ingredient in the canonical heritage of the Church, whose purpose along with the whole of that heritage is to redeem and divinize. Revelation is indeed an epistemic concept for it is constituted by an unveiling of the divine nature, actions, and purposes. So formally, it takes us automatically into the field of religious epistemology. At this level, it is entirely appropriate to argue that revelation is a norm of truth. Given God's attributes and his actions in creation and redemption, what God reveals is trustworthy and true. This follows analytically from the concept of God. Yet it is a mistake in logic to conflate revelation and scripture, as has constantly happened. Materially God has spoken and still speaks through the medium of the scriptures. A faithful testimony or record of God's activity in Christ, if Christ is God incarnate, clearly constitutes divine revelation. Hence scripture and revelation, while they are logically distinct notions, are materially inseparable. For this reason alone theological arguments will often take the form of scriptural arguments resting on complex tacit assumptions about the nature of revelation and its availability in scripture.

We return full circle to a platitudinous account of the relation between Christian scripture and revelation. However, we do so unencumbered by a false view of canon and by the predominantly internalist cast of medieval and modern theology. This in no way entails diffidence about the epistemological questions generated by the gospel and the canonical teaching of the Church. Historically, Christian intellectuals have been extraordinarily versatile in exploring epistemic issues. They have also contributed extensively to the development of epistemological theory in their quest to satisfy their own questions and the criticisms of philosophers and theologians. Abandoning the longstanding confusion of ecclesial canons with epistemic norms, of scripture with divine revelation, will enrich rather than inhibit this astounding legacy of epistemic theory and discussion. It should also prove extremely fruitful in a fresh conversation between Jews, Christians, and Muslims on the contested site of divine revelation.

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## Philosophical Reflection on Mysticism

ANTHONY NOVAK PEROVICH, JR.

While philosophy and mysticism have been involved with one another since antiquity, philosophical reflection on mysticism is a relatively recent phenomenon, arising little more than a century ago and even since then occurring only sporadically until more recent decades. For the better part of the twentieth century what philosophical reflection on mysticism there was exhibited a number of shared features. This mainstream understood mysticism in terms of mystical experience and regarded those experiences – despite their widely separated occurrence across time, place, culture, and religious tradition – as sufficiently independent of their situation to make possible classification within a small number of types. In more recent years, the increasing philosophical literature on mysticism has often been critical of this mainstream, whose understanding of the subject could be undermined, it was thought, by a more careful attention to context. As the contexts appealed to have varied, so of course have the directions from which the attacks have been mounted.

### Mainstream Philosophy of Mysticism

The mainstream of philosophical discussion of mysticism – a “mainstream” at least in the senses that it tends to be the reference point for so many subsequent discussions and that there is a continuous current of work embracing its general approach throughout the twentieth century and beyond – has been concerned to define what mysticism is, to establish the typologies according to which mystical experiences may be organized, and to assess the cognitive value of mystical states. The attempts to establish the validity of cognitive claims based on these states, however, will not be considered here (see Chapter 48, Religious Experience), nor will the contrary attempts to impugn the validity of such claims (often reductive, and often coming from psychological, sociological, or neuroscientific perspectives; see Chapter 61, Naturalistic Explanations of Theistic Belief).

As noted, within this mainstream the study of mysticism has been identified with the study of mystical experience. Mystical experience has tended to be defined in terms of ineffability, union, and knowledge: for example, mystical states have been demarcated by reference to their ineffability, noetic quality, transience, and passivity (James

1987, pp. 343–4) or characterized as unitary (in the sense that ordinary distinctions between subject and object and among different objects break down), noetic, and lacking in specific empirical content (Wainwright 1981, p. 1). Ineffability has attracted negative attention because the claim that mystical experience (or the “object” of mystical experience) is ineffable, while certainly encountered in mystics’ writings, can seem logically perplexing and in any case sits uncomfortably alongside their authors’ loquacity; moreover, critics note that “ineffability” identifies no positive characteristic, so that utterly different experiences may yet be described as ineffable. In any case, while of continuing interest, it no longer possesses the definitional centrality that James’ account gave to it. The primacy of union in relation to mystical experience has also been importantly challenged as too limiting. Even with regard to Christian mysticism alone a more inclusive understanding of the mystical in terms of consciousness of the immediate and direct presence of God has been thought necessary. “Union” provides one but by no means the only model for such a sense of presence.

Defining mystical experience suggests that mystical experiences form a unified field of study. Within this philosophical mainstream, however, offering a single definition is not taken to imply that all mystical experiences are alike; rather, mystical experiences fall into a relatively small number of types which are not limited by time, place, or religious tradition; these types form a related family of experiences. So understood, the mainstream would include many of the writers on mysticism early in the twentieth century and such more recent figures as W. T. Stace, R. C. Zaehner, and William Wainwright, as well as the more recent critics of “constructivism.” The types recognized vary from author to author, but the number is relatively small. From the early part of the twentieth century a basic division of mystical experiences into those that are inwardly directed and those that are outwardly directed became commonplace. In his search for the “common core” of all mystical experience, Stace adopted this distinction and established the terminology that has become canonical, differentiating “extrovertive” mystical states, states in which all things are recognized as one in a unifying vision, from “introvertive” mystical states, states of pure and unitary consciousness (Stace 1960, ch. 2).

Subsequent authors have taken over the basic distinction while recognizing further subdivisions. Several find within introvertive mysticism not only a monistic mysticism of pure consciousness without distinction but also a theistic mysticism that is dualistic and typically expressed by the imagery of mutual love. Extrovertive mysticism also embraces numerous subdivisions. Scholars locate here not only experiences that exhibit a sense of extrovertive unity but also those that represent the temporal character of the natural world as transformed; for example, time appears to stand still or temporal succession remains but past, present, and future appear to be apprehended in their entirety and all at once. Then there are extrovertive experiences in which the natural world is viewed as a living presence or, as in certain forms of Buddhism, as empty. And several different sorts of unitary extrovertive experiences are recognized: subjects experience the world as a unified whole, they experience themselves as a part of the world, as identical with it, or as containing the world within themselves, etc. Some of these features may, of course, overlap in a single experience. Nevertheless, while the mystical experiences here are extrovertive by virtue of being directed toward the natural world, their variety is considerable.

The mainstream viewpoint is compelled to address the fact that, although the types of mystical experiences that it recognizes are limited, the ways in which these experiences are described by their subjects exhibit great variety. Above all, the language that is applied to these experiences often employs concepts drawn from the religious traditions to which the mystics belong. One way of reconciling the variety in reports with the relatively few acknowledged types of what is being reported is to distinguish mystical experiences from interpretations of mystical experiences: even where there is a common core of experiences that transcends cultural and traditional boundaries, those cultures and traditions affect the ways in which the subjects of these experiences characterize them.

The notion of a uniform mystical experience exhibiting only a few basic types that span time, place, and religious traditions has been subjected to vigorous criticism. Not only is philosophical reflection on mysticism of relatively recent vintage, but the supposedly uniform mystical phenomenon on which so much philosophical reflection dwells is itself claimed to be a construction of recent vintage, a construction that falsifies the data which it purports to study. James remarked that “there is about mystical utterances an eternal unanimity which ought to make a critic stop and think” (James 1987, p. 378), but for many critics it is precisely this allegation of eternal unanimity that makes them stop and object. The unanimity of utterance is an artifact, deriving, it is claimed, from the fact that the philosophical treatments of mysticism that discover it are too often based on short passages from mystical texts taken out of context. A general objection is that attention to context shows that mysticism is not the unitary phenomenon affirmed in various ways by the philosophical mainstream. Critics who advance this objection vary according to whether they hold that the crucial context is conceptual, historical, or sociopolitical. The aim in each case, however, is to discredit the mainstream position by establishing multiplicity rather than unity, division instead of seamless commonality.

## Constructivism

Emphasis on the conceptual context provided by the religious tradition to which the mystic belongs has provided one basis for a criticism of the mainstream. The challenge adopts an epistemological standpoint that regards all experiences as structured by the conceptual frameworks that subjects bring with them to experience, so that there are no experiences that are unmediated by our concepts (Katz 1978, p. 26). The sources of the frameworks that pertain to mystical experience are diverse, but the doctrines and practices of the mystics’ religious traditions are the most significant. If these traditions are the main sources for the concepts involved in the construction of mystical experiences – hence the term “constructivism” applied to this approach – then those experiences will naturally divide up not into sorts that cut across religious divisions but into sorts that correspond to or are at least limited to those divisions. The religion-specific reports by mystics are not, then, interpretations of a non-religion-specific type of experience, for if experiences are invariably shaped by their subjects’ concepts and if the subjects’ reports employ language incorporating those concepts, the natural conclusion is that those reports are not interpretations but phenomenologically accurate

descriptions of the experiences themselves. What Katz says of the relation between the religious context and the experience of the Jewish mystic is true of the constructivist account of mysticism generally: “these images, beliefs, symbols, and rituals define, *in advance*, what the experience *he wants to have*, and which he then does have, will be like” (Katz 1978, p. 33).

The constructivist attack permits a variety of responses. Mainstream philosophers of mysticism do not necessarily deny that mystical experiences incorporate some conceptual content, although they will deny that such content rules out experiential similarities (in particular, the similarities that justify their typologies) from manifesting themselves across religious divides. The most fundamental reply, however, involves an appeal to mystical experiences themselves. Each of the fundamental mainstream subdivisions presents a challenge to the constructivist critique – introvertive experience because it presents itself as conceptually unencumbered, and extrovertive experience because it often arises spontaneously, independent of the sort of religious preparation thought to shape mystical experiences. The most promising examples of experiences entirely unmediated by concepts have proven to be those exhibiting “pure” consciousness, experiences in which the subject’s mental state is wakeful but without any content, in which the subject is aware without being aware of anything (Forman 1990, p. 8). Because of its purity, this state of consciousness does not seem to offer any content subject to the conceptual structuring posited by the constructivist; because it is (one of) the introvertive state(s) recognized by the mainstream typologies, its mystical status is already vouched for in the context of the discussion; and because it is claimed to be widely dispersed, it is a plausible candidate for a type of mystical experience that spans religious traditions. Constructivists may respond that even in this case the conceptual framework can be operating at an unconscious level to shape an experience that at the conscious level is experienced as unshaped. Moreover, it may be asked whether such experiences can have any cognitive value if they are really as empty as the philosophical adherents of pure consciousness describe them to be. Extrovertive mystical experiences, on the other hand, are noetic and are doubtless conceptually structured, though not by the sorts of concepts that would make them tradition-specific. Rather than coming as the culmination of a process of religious training, such experiences often occur spontaneously and outside a religious framework altogether. Indeed, youngsters who have enjoyed such experiences have later commented on their lack at the time of any categories that would have enabled them to make sense of what they had undergone. These often unprompted experiences are thus unlikely to be persuasively represented as the result of conditioning provided by religious traditions.

Finally, the constructivist approach is epistemologically controversial. To be sure, constructivists claim that they are employing widely accepted epistemological assumptions and that they are basing their conclusions on what the texts actually say, texts which after all provide the primary access scholars have to mystical experience. However, critics respond that an epistemological model developed for ordinary experience is simply stipulated *a priori* to be relevant to extraordinary cases and that the unusual experiences described above give reason for being wary about that model’s applicability to mystical cases.

The constructivist critique, by drawing on the conceptual contributions made by contemporary religions, offers a critique based largely on synchronic phenomena.



Other criticisms introduce a diachronic dimension by focusing instead on contexts that have changed over time. Michel de Certeau (1992) has recounted the rise and decline of a new science of mystics ("la mystique") that developed in the late medieval period and had dissolved by the end of the seventeenth century. This readily suggests that mysticism may not be a historically constant phenomenon; moreover, the modern philosophical study of mysticism may itself be historically conditioned in such a way that it distorts the object of its study. Two different approaches that incorporate this line of criticism deserve mention, as the contexts on which they draw are markedly diverse.

### Anti-"experientialism"

Just such a contrast of contexts, one between the context within which modern philosophical reflection on mysticism arose and the context within which the Western medieval Christian tradition is to be properly understood, has been developed into a critique of mainstream philosophy of mysticism. The modern study of mysticism arose in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when intellectual developments had given impetus to the search for a common foundation on which the various religious traditions could be seen to be based, and mystical experience served the ecumenical purpose. The medieval Christian mystical tradition, on the other hand, arose in the context of Neoplatonic dialectical epistemology. In the mystical discourse of this tradition, negation operates at two levels: first, as the contradictory counterpart to affirmations about God, as when Dionysius affirms and then denies that God is light, and second, when the affirmations and denials of the first level are denied. At this second, apophatic level, while we know what affirmations we deny, the denials tell us nothing of what lies beyond them. God is thus seen to be the one who transcends anything we can know, anything we can experience. He is not the object of any sort of consciousness but rather is what is on the other side of anything of which we can be conscious.

Problems arise when mysticism as understood in the former context is employed to explicate the medieval mysticism that in fact requires the second context for its proper appreciation. "Experientialism" misinterprets the negation of all religious experience found in medieval texts as the experience of negation: "Experientialism is, in short, the 'positivism' of Christian spirituality. It abhors the experiential vacuum of the apophatic, rushing to fill it with the plenum of the psychologistic" (Turner 1995, p. 259). On this reading, modern philosophy of mysticism is radically mistaken not for maintaining that mystical experience is the common property of various religious traditions, but for maintaining that mysticism, or at least a large and significant portion of the mystical tradition, is about mystical experience at all.

If nothing else, this critique alerts one to something that mainstream philosophers of mysticism do not much comment on, although it is elsewhere a commonplace, namely, how infrequent the reference to experience is among those commonly regarded as mystics. And yet the reference to what seems to be mystical experience does not seem to be simply a modern innovation. Not only is the anti-experientialist case made by a rather selective approach to the mystical tradition (even in the West), but within the

limited canon involved one still finds appeals to experience, as when Dionysius himself praises his teacher for not merely learning the divine things but experiencing them as well or describes Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai in terms that suggest to some experience not only of a rather dramatic sort but of the sort encountered in the pure consciousness event. The suggestions that mysticism as it is discussed in different historical periods may require different perspectives if it is to be properly understood and that modern philosophy of mysticism is itself historically situated are, however, of undoubted interest and also animate the last context-based critique of the mainstream to be considered.

## Feminism

Feminists have also noted that the mainstream understanding of mysticism is of recent vintage and that this understanding is but one of the social constructions that the notion has received throughout its history (for example, for the initiates of ancient mystery religions "the mystical" was that about which they maintained silence in certain rituals, for early Christians it was a hidden meaning of scripture, for certain visionaries it was the personal revelation that they received, etc.). This suggests that reflection might be guided better by a sociopolitical rather than an epistemological context, a context in which considerations of justice are paramount, for various feminists have suggested that the very notion of mystical experience employed by the philosophical mainstream is informed in one way or another by gender bias (see Chapter 81, Feminism). Just as the social constructs that have been used to define mysticism in the past have been bound up with issues of authority and gender, it is to be suspected that the mainstream contemporary construct is as well. For example, the sociopolitical context has been seen as influencing what the mainstream takes to be a neutral, objective description of its subject matter as private, subjective, intense psychological states (a characterization of the mystical alleged to be frequently absent altogether from the Christian mystical tradition for long periods). The subjectivity and intensity of the modern construct mark out the states on which it focuses as emotional rather than discursive and thus the likely province of women. Moreover, just as women have in modern times been relegated to the private sphere, mysticism has become domesticated and non-threatening: in consequence, while available to all, it occupies the social location where women are most likely to dwell. "The privatized, subjectivized ineffable mysticism of William James and his followers is open to women as well as to men; but it plays directly into the hands of modern bourgeois political and gender assumptions" (Jantzen 1995, p. 346): those who nurture the inner life, primarily women who remain outside the public sphere, prop up the status quo by finding alternate satisfactions in their private, depoliticized spiritual lives.

Now rather than regarding "the mystical" as the name of a social construct that is differently constructed in different times, the term may be considered as merely equivocal: treating the phenomena that have been termed "mystical" together is consequently misleading rather than illuminating. Moreover, the association of mystical experiences with intense, subjective, ineffable ones is hardly the innovation of the modern philosophical mainstream, as examples of this emphasis can be identified among many of the

mystics of earlier ages. Challenges may also be directed toward the connection suggested between the privacy of mystical experience and patterns of authority and gender relations. Gellman, for example, points out that mystical experiences are not private at all in a sociological sense: they are spoken and written about, leading at some times to prestige and power, at others to repression and marginalization. But the feminist critique, while illuminating when discussing the larger social phenomenon that is mysticism, does nothing to undermine the philosophical legitimacy of studying mystical experience, which is psychologically rather than sociologically private insofar as the experience involves a subject's internal experiential state (Gellman 2001, pp. 107–8).

## Concluding Remarks

The criticism of recent decades has made clear the importance of context in evaluating the claims made by mainstream philosophical reflection on mysticism. No consensus has emerged: those who continue to represent the mainstream are more attentive to contexts of various sorts than were some of their predecessors, but they have not regarded the philosophical legitimacy of the mainstream project as having been successfully impugned. Nor, it must be said, have the critics been convinced by the responses. The best defense of that project, however, will be seen in the philosophical uses to which the claims of tradition-independent mystical experiences can be put.

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## Religious Pluralism

JOHN HICK

Until recently philosophy of religion, as practiced in the West, has meant philosophy of the Christian religion and has concentrated primarily on the Christian (or the Judeo-Christian) concept of God. However, it is clear that in principle philosophy of religion has no confessional boundaries and is concerned with religion throughout the world and in its wide variety of forms. Accordingly, during the last 20 or so years Western philosophers of religion have increasingly felt obliged to take note of the fact that Christianity is only one of the great world faiths and that monotheism is only one of the major types of religion (see Chapter 85, Comparative Philosophy of Religion), so that it is now common for new texts on the subject to include a chapter on the problems of religious pluralism, which are primarily epistemological.

### The Epistemology of Religion and Conflicting Truth-Claims

A recent major development in the epistemology of religion has highlighted the problem of the conflicting truth-claims of the different religions. With the widespread consensus that the traditional theistic arguments fail to prove, and that the idea of probability has no useful purchase here – although there are prominent thinkers who resist these conclusions – a different approach to the rationality or otherwise of theistic belief has emerged. This centers upon religious experience as a putative cognition of God (see Chapter 48, Religious Experience). Religious people report a wide range of forms of distinctively religious experience, including mystical experiences of direct awareness of, and even union with, God; a sense of divine presence in moments of worship or of contemplation; an indirect consciousness of God in the feeling of absolute dependence upon a creator, or of a divine presence and activity mediated through the beauties and sublimities of nature, the claims of conscience, the profound significance of human love, the crises of birth and death, and many kinds of personal and historical events (see Chapter 26, Holiness). Can such modes of experience count as good grounds for belief in the reality of God or in a transcendent reality?

The older kind of apologetic used religious experience as a phenomenon that points to God as its cause. This is open to the objection that such experiences may have a purely natural origin in the human imagination (see Chapter 61, Naturalistic

Explanations of Theistic Belief). The universe, including human religious experience, thus remains objectively ambiguous. But the new type of apologetic starts at this point. It involves a shift from an external, or third person, use of religious experience to an internal, or first person, use. Instead of asking whether it is rational to infer God from the reported religious experiences of others, it asks whether it is rational for religious experiencers themselves to believe in the reality of God on the basis of their own experience. To take a paradigm case, was it rational for Jesus, vividly conscious of God's presence, so that the heavenly Father was as real to him as his human neighbors, to believe in God's reality? Would it not indeed have been irrational, a kind of cognitive suicide on his part, not so to believe?

At this point the "principle of credulity," or better, the principle of critical trust, is invoked, according to which it is rational to trust our experience as corresponding to reality except insofar as we have reason to distrust it (for further discussion of the principle of credulity, see Chapter 80, Evidentialism). We apply this principle in our ordinary experience of our physical environment: we do not need a reason to trust sense experience in general but rather a reason to distrust it on particular occasions. And it is claimed that the same principle should apply, impartially, to religious experience as a form of apparently cognitive experience. *Prima facie* it is an awareness of a non-physical divine reality; the critical task is to examine and assess possible overriding considerations.

This approach has been most massively and systematically presented by William Alston (1991). Given the basic principle that religious experience has parity with sense experience as a *prima facie* ground of rational belief, discussion centers upon reasons to trust one whilst distrusting the other. Such reasons are: first, whereas sense experience is universal and compulsory, religious experience is optional and confined to a limited number of people, so that whilst sensory reports can in principle be confirmed by anyone, religious experience reports cannot; and second, whereas sense experience produces a universally agreed description of the physical world, religious experience within the different traditions produces different and often incompatible descriptions of the divine.

The first objection has met with the reply that whereas our basic freedom as persons is not undermined by a compulsory awareness of the natural world, it would be undermined by a compulsory awareness of an unlimitedly valuable reality whose very existence lays a total claim upon us. Thus the difference on which the objection is based is matched by a corresponding difference between the putative objects of sensory and religious experience respectively. Hence it is appropriate for consciousness of God not to be forced upon us, as is our consciousness of the physical world; and it is accordingly possible for many people, as a result of upbringing or certain adverse circumstances, or of a conscious or unconscious choice, to shut it out (see Chapter 60, Divine Hiddenness).

The second objection, however, is more formidable. Alston claims (as do many other philosophers who adopt the same kind of apologetic) that because it is rational to base beliefs on religious experience, Christian religious experience entitles those who participate in it to hold distinctively Christian beliefs. But obviously by the same principle Islamic religious experience entitles Muslims to hold distinctively Islamic beliefs, Buddhist religious experience entitles Buddhists to hold distinctively Buddhist beliefs,



and so on. Alston acknowledges this and regards it as “the most difficult problem for my position” (Alston 1991, p. 255). It is an equally difficult problem for other related positions, such as the claim that the core Christian beliefs require no justification because they are “properly basic” (see Chapter 79, *Reformed Epistemology*).

Alston’s response is based upon the traditional assumption that there can be, at most, only one true religion, in the sense of a religion that teaches the truth. From a religious point of view the question now becomes: which is the true religion? Alston argues that since the beliefs of each major world faith are equally well based in religious experience, and there are no neutral grounds on which to choose between them, I must simply rely on my own form of religious experience and presume that the other forms are (wholly or partly) delusory. On analogy with rival ways of construing the world – for example, Aristotelian, Cartesian, Whiteheadian, – “the only rational course for me is to sit tight with the [epistemic] practice of which I am master and which serves me so well in guiding my activity in the world. Hence, by parity of reasoning, the rational thing for a practitioner of CP [Christian epistemic practice] to do is to continue to form Christian M-beliefs [beliefs about divine manifestations], and, more generally, to continue to accept, and operate in accordance with, the system of Christian belief” (Alston 1991, p. 274).

The problem raised by this defense does not lie in the advice to “sit tight” in the situation as Alston defines it, but in the way in which he defines the situation. For the assumption that only one of the competing sets of religious beliefs can be true conflicts with Alston’s basic principle that religious experience, like sense experience, gives rise to true beliefs (specific “defeaters” apart). Indeed Alston unintentionally reverses this basic principle by making religious experience within one’s own tradition the sole exception to the general rule that religious experience gives rise to *false* beliefs! For the only-one-true-religion premise, together with the fact that the experientially based beliefs of the different religions are often incompatible, entails that religious experience can be a valid basis for belief in the case of only one religion at most. In all other cases beliefs based upon religious experience are false insofar as they conflict with the privileged exception of one’s own religion. Thus the fact of religious diversity undermines the entire argument that religious experience has *prima facie* parity with sense experience in producing true beliefs.

## The Relation Between Religions

I place this area of discussion next because any solution to the problem just noted must be derived from it.

From a naturalistic point of view, according to which religion in all its forms is a delusory projection upon the universe of our human hopes, fears, or ideals (as Feuerbach believed), the truth-claims of the different religions are all false, and the fact that they conflict with one another does not present any problem. However the problem is acute from a religious point of view according to which religious experience, whilst obviously involving imaginative projection, is not purely this but is at the same time a cognitive response to a transcendent reality.

A variety of religious, as distinguished from naturalistic, interpretations of religion have been offered, each of which would solve the conflicting truth-claims problem in its own way.

### *Truth-claims exclusivism*

The most widely, if usually implicitly, held view is that there can only be one true religion, and that this is one's own. The others are false, at least insofar as their beliefs are incompatible with the home religion. This is what most of the adherents of each religion, including some but not all of its reflective thinkers, have generally assumed.

However, a "hermeneutic of suspicion" is provoked by the evident fact that in perhaps 99 percent of cases the religion to which one adheres (or against which one reacts) is selected by the accident of birth. Someone born to devout Muslim parents in Iran or Indonesia is very likely to be a Muslim; someone born to devout Buddhist parents in Thailand or Sri Lanka is very likely to be a Buddhist; someone born to devout Christian parents in Italy or Mexico is very likely to be a Catholic Christian; and so on. Thus there is a certain non-rational arbitrariness in the claim that the particular tradition within which one happens to have been born is the one and only true religion. And if the conviction is added that salvation and eternal life depend upon accepting its truths, it may well seem unfair that this saving truth is known only to one group in which only a minority of the human race have had the good fortune to find themselves.

This thought has been countered by some Christian philosophers by an appeal to middle knowledge – God's knowledge of what everyone *would* do in all possible circumstances – proposing that God knows of every individual who, because of the circumstances of his or her birth has not had an opportunity to respond to the Christian gospel, that they *would* have freely rejected it if they had heard it (see Chapter 56, Foreknowledge and Human Freedom). This suggestion, which could of course be deployed from within each religion, involves an idea that is theologically objectionable to many, namely that God has created vast numbers of people whom God knows will forfeit salvation. There is, however, among contemporary Christian thinkers, a strong inclusivist trend which separates knowing the truth from receiving salvation, and holds that some (or all) of those who do not in this life come to know the truth may nevertheless, by divine grace, either be counted now as "anonymous Christians" or may receive Christian salvation in or beyond death. The question here is whether there is not still an arbitrary privileging of one's own religion as the sole channel of salvation.

There are, however, other religious interpretations of religion which do not presuppose that there can only be one religion that knows the truth and is a locus of salvation. These are broadly described as pluralistic.

### *The transcendent unity of religions*

Proponents of the "perennial philosophy" such as Frithjof Schuon (1975), René Guenon, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and others distinguish between the esoteric religion of the mystics and the exoteric religions of the mass of

believers. The former is, in its innermost core, identical across the different religions, whereas the latter, consisting of culturally conditioned concepts, doctrines, imagery, lifestyle, and spiritual practices, differ and are indeed at many points mutually incompatible. Each exoteric tradition (historical Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.) should accordingly maintain its own unique individuality, because each is a valid expression of the ultimate reality that is directly known by the mystics in an experience that constitutes the transcendent unity of religion. Mysticism is here seen as the core of religion. One feature of this approach, which seems inadequate to some pluralists, is that it requires no reformation of the historical religions.

Considerable discussion has centered upon the question whether unitive mysticism constitutes (as is claimed for it) a direct and unmediated awareness of the ultimate divine reality, or whether even this experience is conditioned by the thought-forms of the mystic's tradition (see Katz 1978; see also Chapter 83, *Philosophical Reflection on Mysticism*). For whilst some unitive mystics report union with a divine person, others report union with a non- or trans-personal reality. Are these differences to be attributed to varying theological interpretations of a common ineffable experience, or are the reports to be accepted as accounts of genuinely different experiences? Or should we hold that a pre-conscious interpretative activity enters into the formation of the conscious experience, so that it may be true both that mystics of different traditions are encountering the same reality and yet also that their actual conscious experiences are characteristically different?

### *Multiple aspects and complementarity pluralism*

These alternatives tend to merge. Peter Byrne (Byrne 1995) holds that there is an Ultimate Reality with many aspects, some personal and some non-personal, and that each of the great world faiths arises from awareness of one of these aspects. The result is that "different religions have complementary insights into the one reality and thus that a fuller account of that reality can be provided if these insights are set alongside each other" (p. 165). Ninian Smart (in Kellenberger 1993 and elsewhere) and Keith Ward (1994 and elsewhere) likewise stress the idea of the complementarity of the world religions. Ward affirms a "Supreme Spiritual Reality," different but complementary aspects of which have been revealed within the different world religions. Thus, for example, "the Semitic and Indian traditions are complementary, emphasizing the active and unchanging poles respectively of the Supreme Spiritual Reality to which they both seek to relate" (1994, p. 331). And through their friendly interactions, each seeking to learn from the others, a "convergent spirituality" may emerge in forms that cannot be known in advance. The question that arises here is whether these different "aspects" are such that they can coherently be attributed to the same reality.

That question is addressed in another version of complementary pluralism, that of John Cobb, based on the metaphysics of A. N. Whitehead. According to Whitehead there are three equally ultimate realities, Creativity, God, and the Cosmos. The focus of the theistic religions is God; the focus of Buddhism, with Buddhism's stress on transitoriness and "emptiness," is Creativity; and the focus of primal and contemporary North American religion is the cosmos, the physical world around us. Cobb says that the different religions thus embody "diverse aspects of the totality of reality" (Cobb

1999, p. 135). This is a comprehensive proposal; its limitation, however, is that it depends on a prior acceptance of Whitehead's philosophy.

### *Polycentric pluralism*

The complementary and multiple aspect forms of pluralism are both "polycentric," but another, more explicit version of this is offered by the theologian Mark Heim, who sees each of the world religions as different paths to different ends, both in this life and in the afterlife. Christians live a Christian life and then eternally in the Christian heaven; Muslims live an Islamic life and then eternally in the Islamic paradise; Buddhists live a Buddhist life and attain to the eternal state of Nirvana; and so on. Heim holds that each person freely chooses the path and the end that he/she desires, so that each is satisfied, and the totality constitutes a rich variety that is pleasing to God. In Heim's case this is not, strictly speaking, a version of pluralism because he explicitly holds that the Christian heaven is the highest and best end state, the others being variously less good. But the problem that is worth highlighting, because it applies equally to the other polycentric theory that I shall come to presently, is that it is unrealistic to think that each person freely chooses the religion to which they adhere, with its distinctive path in life and its promised post-mortem state. As we have seen, in the vast majority of cases human beings inherit their religion along with their language and culture, rather than choosing it from among a number of options. If one religion and its end state is superior to all others, the situation becomes profoundly unfair, and incompatible with any idea of a just or loving God.

A more philosophically sophisticated theory is offered by Stephen Kaplan. To do full justice to its complexities it is necessary to read Kaplan himself. But, in brief, he uses the physicist David Bohm's holographic model. A holograph records the information necessary to produce a three-dimensional image which will appear differently when seen from different angles and distances. In religion these different appearances are the different God figures of the theistic traditions. This is the explicate order of reality, which provides for the diversity of deities, and also for the Buddhist conception of an ever-changing flow of events. But the implicate order (which, he stipulates, is logically required by the explicate order) is unitary, corresponding in religion to the non-dual Brahman. All these different "ultimate realities," theistic and non-theistic, are equally real and equally valuable. However, in more usual philosophical terms, these are not different ultimate realities, but different aspects, implicate and explicate, of a single ultimate reality. A question that arises is: in what sense are they all equally valuable? And, like Heim, Kaplan believes that each individual chooses his or her preferred path, which, as noted above, is completely unrealistic.

### *The Kantian-type pluralist hypothesis*

The Kantian-type pluralist hypothesis (Hick 1989 and elsewhere) is based upon a Kantian-type distinction between the Real (or the Divine or the Ultimate) in itself and the Real as variously humanly conceived and experienced. The modern consensus that the perceiver always contributes to the form in which the environment is perceived was most influentially introduced into philosophy by Immanuel Kant, but has been

reinforced by work in cognitive psychology, in the sociology of knowledge, and also now in quantum physics. It is now a commonplace that we do not perceive the physical world as it is in itself, unobserved, but always and necessarily as it appears to beings with our particular sensory equipment and conceptual resources.

Kant sought to identify the concepts in terms of which we order and give meaning to our experience in the activity of bringing it to consciousness. We can apply the same method to religious experience. The pluralistic hypothesis is that the Real (to select this term from several equally appropriate ones) in itself is present to us, or impinges upon us, all the time and that when this impingement comes to consciousness it takes the form of what we call religious experience – or often, in secular societies, in awareness of a moral imperative. Such experience is, however, very diverse, depending upon the set of religious concepts in terms of which it is constructed. The two basic concepts are deity, or the Real as personal, and the absolute, or the Real as non-personal, the former issuing in the theistic and the latter in the non-theistic forms of religion. We are not, however, aware of deity in general or of the absolute in general. These concepts are (in Kantian language) schematized or made more concrete, not, however as in Kant's system, in terms of abstract time, but in terms of the filled time of history and culture. Thus human beings are specifically aware of the Yahweh who chose and specially treasures the children of Israel; or of the Vishnu or the Siva worshipped within the Hindu traditions; or of the Holy Trinity of Christian devotion; or of the God whose angel revealed to the prophet Muhammad the words of the Qur'an; and so on. These, and the many other God figures, are *personae* of the Real, each jointly formed by its universal presence to humanity and the particular conceptualities and spiritual practices of the different theistic traditions. Again, the trans- or non-personal Brahman, Tao, Dharmakaya, Nirvana, Sunyata are *impersonae* of the Real, formed similarly but by means of very different concepts. The basic epistemological principle is that stated by Thomas Aquinas: "Things known are in the knower according to the mode of the knower" (*Summa Theologiae*, II/II.1.2).

On this hypothesis the nature of the Real in itself is beyond the range of our (other than purely formal) human concepts. It is in Western terms ineffable or transcategorical, or in Eastern terms formless. In Kantian language, the noumenal Real is humanly experienced as a range of divine phenomena.

The criterion by which religions are judged to be authentic or inauthentic, for this hypothesis, arises within a circular argument which is entered through the acceptance of the religious experience of one's own tradition as not purely imaginative projection but at the same time a cognitive response to a transcendent reality; and through the extension of this principle to other religions whose moral and spiritual fruits seem to be more or less on a par with those of one's own. These fruits thus provide a common criterion by which to recognize the salvific transformation of human existence from natural self-centeredness to a new orientation centered in the Real, a transformation which takes different concrete forms within different religious cultures.

This Kantian-type hypothesis addresses the problem of the conflicting truth-claims of the different religions by the proposal that they do not in fact conflict because they are claims about different manifestations of the Real to different human faith communities, each operating with its own conceptuality, spiritual practices, form of life, and treasury of myths and stories and historical memories. One of the main critical ques-

tions about this hypothesis is whether, in reducing the distinctive belief-systems of the different religions from absolute truths to reports of one human perception amongst others of the divine reality, it does not contradict the cherished self-understanding of each. Is it not inherently revisionary rather than purely descriptive?

The whole subject, within philosophy of religion, of the relation between the religious traditions presents so obvious a challenge to a dominant contemporary form of confessional religious apologetic, that it seems inevitable that it will be increasingly widely discussed in the coming decades.

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## Comparative Philosophy of Religion

PAUL J. GRIFFITHS

This chapter will explore possible understandings of the activity mentioned in its title, and will discuss some examples of it. How comparative philosophy of religion is understood depends in significant measure upon how philosophy of religion is understood, and this is not an uncontroversial question. Some historical remarks are essential, since some of the difficulties in seeing what is denoted by “philosophy of religion” and its derivative “comparative philosophy of religion” are rooted in historical developments specific to Europe since the seventeenth century.

The idea that there is such a thing as philosophy of religion depends in large part upon the idea that there is something called religion which it is reasonable to have a philosophy of; or upon the idea that the phenomenon of religion brings with it, or has involved in it, some philosophical problems. The first way of thinking construes the phrase “philosophy of religion” as containing an objective genitive: it understands religion (or the idea of religion) as the proper object of the philosophy done by philosophers of religion, much as law (or the idea of law) tends to be understood as the proper object of the philosophy done by philosophers of law. The second way of thinking construes the phrase differently, as containing a subjective genitive and therefore as suggesting that the proper scope of the philosophy of religion is those questions that arise out of religion as such, or out of some particular religion. On this construal, “philosophy of religion” indicates the philosophical questions or the philosophical activity that belongs to religion, or to some specific religion. On the first construal a typical question might be: what is the nature of religion? Or: is there only one religion or are there many? Or: are there modes of understanding or judgment peculiar to religion? On the second construal a typical question might be: can one coherently assert both that there are no enduring selves, and that all human persons have had many lives and will have many more? (A question that belongs to or arises out of the Buddhist religion.) Or: does it follow from the existence of abstract objects that God exists? (A question that belongs to or arises out of some theistic religion or other, or out of theistic religion generally.)

Both these construals depend upon the assumption that there is something called religion; they mostly also assume that religion is a genus of which there are species: that there is, let us say, the Buddhist religion, the Christian religion, and so forth. On the first construal of philosophy of religion, philosophers will focus upon the genus: they will ask about the nature of religion, about the relations that obtain among the

phenomena that constitute it, and about the ways in which particular species are related to the genus. On the second construal they will focus upon species-specific questions of the kind mentioned. Both approaches have been widely evident among European and American philosophers since the sixteenth century, though the first is not clearly seen before that time, and the second is not commonly denoted by the phrase “philosophy of religion” until the nineteenth century (though it has of course been practiced by philosophically inclined members of all religious traditions).

The new development in European thought that made it possible to do philosophy of religion in the first sense, and to rename philosophical discussion of questions specific to Judaism or Christianity or Islam “philosophy of religion” (as distinct from “philosophical theology” or “fundamental theology” or some such label), is then precisely the idea that there is a genus religion that has species or particular instantiations (see Chapter 9, The Christian Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology; Chapter 10, The Islamic Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology; and Chapter 11, The Jewish Contribution to Medieval Philosophical Theology). This idea is evident already in thinkers such as Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64) and Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583–1648), but it becomes a central theme and a standard assumption in the work on religion done by Baruch Spinoza, John Locke, and Gottfried Leibniz in the seventeenth century, and is the very organizing principle of David Hume’s writing on religion, and of Immanuel Kant’s and G. W. F. Hegel’s lectures on the philosophy of religion (Kant usually calls the discipline *philosophische Religionslehre*, and Hegel *Philosophie der Religion*). But this is a new idea. It is not found among Christian thinkers in late antiquity or in medieval Europe, for whom *religio* meant usually the set of institutional arrangements, beliefs, and practices that made possible proper commerce with God, and not a genus of which there are species (Augustine’s treatment of the term in his *On True Religion* is typical). Only when this new idea is in play does it begin to make sense to think of philosophy of religion as a discipline distinct from (what Christians call) philosophical theology.

Philosophy of religion as taught in departments of philosophy or religion in anglophone universities today bears the marks of this history (for more see Collins 1967; and Chapter 14, The Emergence of Modern Philosophy of Religion). Most of it treats questions that arise out of or are specific to particular religions (usually Christianity, for obvious reasons), and so falls under the second construal of philosophy of religion. Some, following Kant and Hegel, treat questions belonging to the first construal, among which one of pressing contemporary interest (especially for Christians) is that of how to account for the plurality of religions (see Chapter 84, Religious Pluralism). Given these facts, what might it mean to think of philosophy of religion as comparative? There are three main strategies here, three kinds of intellectual enterprise that have title of some kind to be called comparative philosophy of religion.

### *Definition and classification*

The first approach is typified by Hegel, but is still practiced in various ways. It assumes that there is a genus called religion which has various species, and its main goal is to provide a philosophical account of what is intrinsic to the genus (hence definition), and of the relations among the species (hence classification). In its ideal-typical form, most

closely approached by Hegel in the various versions of his lectures on the philosophy of religion delivered between 1821 and 1831 at the University of Berlin, it begins with an *a priori* definition of religion (Hegel offers several, calling religion, among others things, “spirit that realizes itself in consciousness” and “the relation of human consciousness to God” [Hegel 1984–8 (1821–31), vol. 1, pp. 178, 150]), and then uses that definition as a tool for the organization and classification of information about particular religions (which Hegel usually calls “determinate religions”).

The classification arrived at may be hierarchical, as it clearly was in Hegel’s case. That is, particular religions may be ordered according to the extent to which they approach the ideal type. For Hegel, the particulars of the ordering changed as he became aware of new facts about specific religions that caused him to place them differently in his hierarchy. So, for example, in the lectures of 1824, Buddhism is classified as an example of the religions of magic (1984–8, vol. 2, pp. 303–16), while in 1827 it is reclassified as a religion of being-within-self (vol. 2, pp. 562–79). The change is largely due to Hegel’s having discovered new facts about Buddhism that made it seem reasonable to him to alter its place in his hierarchy. And it is this above all that makes it useful to think of Hegel’s work as an instance of comparative philosophy of religion: he is responsive to information about particular religions, even though that information is subject to an independent *a priori* method of classification. Hegel was in fact well informed about the particulars of the determinate religions, better informed than most of his contemporaries, and much better informed, given the limitations on what could have been known about Asian religions by any European in the first half of the nineteenth century, than most anglophone philosophers of religion at the end of the twentieth century.

A similar approach to philosophy of religion is apparent in the recent work of the English philosopher John Hick. Here too the genus of religion is defined largely in *a priori* terms, this time as the “transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness” (Hick 1984, p. 194; see Hick 1989 for a more detailed treatment). And here too information about particular religions, especially those that Hick tends to call “post-axial,” which means, roughly, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam (Hick 1989, pp. 21–69), is used to show how and to what extent these religions approximate that which is essential to the genus. Hick’s goal is different from Hegel’s in that his classification is resolutely anti-hierarchical; he wants to show that all particular religions (or at least all the post-axial ones) exhibit the defining characteristics of the genus to a roughly equal degree, and as a result should be considered roughly on a par with one another. This is an important difference, but it should not obscure the more fundamental similarity between Hegel and Hick, which is that both are engaged in the comparative philosophy of religion using the method of definition and classification, and that both are centrally concerned with the kinds of question that arise for those who think of the phrase “philosophy of religion” as containing an objective genitive.

### *Structural analysis*

A second strategy that may reasonably be called comparative philosophy of religion interests itself in analyzing one or more of the phenomena that its practitioners take to

belong to the genus religion. Such phenomena might include: doctrine (the claims that religious communities make about what is true and right, claims that they feel required to teach to their members, defend against objections, and the like); ritual (the formalized and repeated corporate practices that religious communities require of their members); and exegesis (the methods that religious communities use to interpret and apply the works they think of as being especially authoritative for them). A comparative philosopher of religion concerned with such phenomena under the rubric of structural analysis will treat not so much the truth or desirability or meaning of particular instances of them (particular doctrines, or rituals, or exegetical activities), as the logical or conceptual structure of the phenomena in question and of their possible uses. And in so doing such a philosopher may (but need not) be comparative, since a philosophical treatment of religious doctrine as such, for instance, will often require attention to particular examples of it that are not drawn solely from any one religious tradition.

An example is to hand in the work of the American philosopher William A. Christian, Sr. He has, in works published during the last three decades or so, been mostly concerned with the philosophical questions arising from a structural analysis of religious doctrine. In his *Oppositions of Religious Doctrines* (1972) Christian treats the conditions of the possibility of deep-going disagreement between different religious doctrines, and does so as an instance of what he calls "critical philosophy of religion," by which he means reflection on the concepts, recommendations, and claims distinctive of religious discourse with an eye to showing what constrains this discourse and what structural possibilities it possesses. Similarly, in his *Doctrines of Religious Communities* (1987), he treats in a formal way the relations that might obtain for religious communities between some claim's being a doctrine of the community, on the one hand, and its being true (in the case of a claim about the setting of human life), or right (in the case of a claim about the Tightness of some pattern of action), on the other. In both books Christian uses examples from different religions, mostly Judaism, Buddhism, and Christianity, as his principal tools of thought; he is careful to distance himself from making empirical claims as to just what these communities actually do teach, avoiding this by making his claims in this area hypothetical. A philosopher with more historical interests than Christian might turn these hypotheses into descriptive claims about what particular religious communities actually teach, as Hegel and Hick do. But that they are there at all in Christian's work indicates the importance of the comparative dimension in that work.

It is of course possible to treat religious phenomena in this structural fashion without being explicitly comparative about it. Philosophers with special interests in religious language, for example, have been doing so for decades (e.g., Phillips 1976; Ricoeur 1980, pp. 73–154). However, there is rather little work as yet of a philosophically-interested structurally analytical kind that, like Christian's, is also comparative. It is to be hoped that there will soon be more, because the concepts derived from it can be of great use for those wanting to engage less formal and more substantive questions in the comparative philosophy of religion.

### *Constructive work*

Finally, there is work in comparative philosophy of religion that is explicitly constructive. It may depend, like the other two strategies, on the assumption that there is a

genus religion, with species. But if it does, this assumption is unlikely to be central, for the main interests of those doing comparative philosophy of religion constructively are in making a contribution of a normative kind to some question that belongs to or arises out of one or more particular religions. So, for instance, one might be constructively interested in the logic of the cosmological argument for the existence of God, but take as one's interlocutors in developing arguments about this philosophers from different traditions – perhaps medieval Indian Srivaisnavas and North African Sunni Muslims. Or one might want to explore the question of revelation, of whether it is sensible to claim that a particular work is, or contains, words whose origin is not human and that have an especially authoritative claim upon humans – and one might take as one's interlocutors Mimamsakas and Kabbalists, both of which groups have interesting views about this question.

Again, there are relatively few instances of such work. An interesting recent example is Lee Yearley's work on the virtue of courage, drawing upon Mencius and Thomas Aquinas as his main interlocutors (Yearley 1990). Yearley's work is avowedly both descriptive (he wants to be clear as to what Mencius and Aquinas thought about the virtue of courage) and normative (he wants to say how best to think about this virtue). It is carefully exegetical, making use of its sources in the languages in which they were composed. And it pays attention to the complex of theoretical questions raised by bringing together thinkers from such different cultural and linguistic settings. The series in which Yearley's work appears, begun in 1990, has published a number of other studies of this sort and promises to continue to do so.

The difficulty of such work means that it may often get bogged down in the theoretical and procedural problems it involves (How is comparison possible? Are there not intractable hermeneutical problems raised for any philosopher dealing with works from very different settings?), and fail to contribute to its constructive agenda. Its promise is that it may feed the imagination in ways impossible for and largely unthinkable to those whose constructive work is either mostly done *a priori*, or on a solidly monotrational basis (Yearley 1990, pp. 196–203). Constructive philosophical argument is in significant part a matter of the imagination; and if the imagination of philosophers of religion is fed and nurtured by close engagement with works in the history of their own tradition, there seems every reason to think it will be fertilized still more by such engagement with what philosophers from other traditions have thought about the matters that concern them.

Of the three strategies discussed here for doing philosophy of religion comparatively – definition and classification, structural analysis, and constructive work – the second and third are likely to prove the most productive in the future, and to attract the most attention. They depend less than the first strategy on the not-unproblematic intuition that there is a genus religion whose definition is a matter of philosophical concern. And they are more likely to engage matters of philosophical substance, and so to make a constructive contribution to questions of pressing current concern in philosophy of religion. Just as discussion of matters of philosophical interest to Christians was transformed by the recovery of Aristotle and the engagement with Jewish and Islamic philosophical theology in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, so it might now be by serious engagement with the philosophical arguments produced by Buddhists, Hindus, Confucians, and others. Similar claims, *mutatis mutandis*, might be made about

discussion of matters of philosophical interest to Jews or Buddhists. Such transformations are the promise of comparative philosophy of religion.

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## Resources for Further Study

Readers whose interest in philosophy of religion has been stimulated by this book may wish to know where to go to learn more. In addition to the individual books and articles cited or recommended in the entries in this volume, four general kinds of resources are worth noting.

### Journals

Philosophy of religion is represented in virtually all the main philosophy journals (*Philosophical Review*, *Mind*, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, and so on), but it is the focus or at least one of the foci of journals like *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, *Religious Studies*, *Faith and Philosophy*, *Philosophy East and West*, *Philo*, *Philosophia Christi*, *Philosophy and Theology*, *Sophia*, *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, *The Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* (formerly called *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*), *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* (formerly called *The New Scholasticism*), and *The Thomist*. Theology and religious studies journals also contain a considerable amount of philosophy of religion, especially *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, *The Journal of Religion*, *Theological Studies*, *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, *Modern Theology*, *Theology Today*, *Harvard Theological Review*, and *Scottish Journal of Theology*. Philosophy of religion can also be found in cross-disciplinary journals such as *Law and Religion*, *The Journal of Law and Religion*, *Religion and Literature*, *Journal of Literature and Theology*, and *Christian Scholar's Review*.

### Books

Several scholarly presses produce series of books in philosophy of religion. Cornell University Press publishes *Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion*, Continuum publishes the series *Continuum Studies in the Philosophy of Religion*, Indiana University Press publishes *The Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion*, Kluwer Academic Publishers publishes *Studies in Philosophy and Religion*, and the State University of New York Press publishes *Toward a Comparative Philosophy of Religion*. Wiley-Blackwell and Routledge

have impressive contributions to philosophy of religion. University presses such as Oxford, Cambridge, and Notre Dame regularly publish work in philosophy of religion in the form of textbooks, anthologies, companions, and monographs. Prometheus Books produces a substantial number of works in philosophy of religion, most of them highly critical of religious belief.

## Organizations

There are regular sessions about philosophy of religion on the programs of the annual meetings of all three divisions of the American Philosophical Association, as well as on the program of the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion. Societies interested in philosophy of religion include: the Society for Philosophy of Religion (USA), the European Society for Philosophy of Religion, the British Society for Philosophy of Religion, the Society of Christian Philosophers, the Philosophy of Religion Society, the American Catholic Philosophical Association, the American Humanist Association, the American Maritain Association, the Fellowship of Religious Humanists, the Jesuit Philosophical Association, the Society for Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy, the Evangelical Philosophical Society, and the Society for Philosophy and Theology. The Center for Philosophy of Religion at the University of Notre Dame offers post-graduate and senior fellowships in philosophy of religion and the Kierkegaard Library at St Olaf College offers fellowships for the study of philosophy of religion that engages the work of Kierkegaard. The Centre of Theology and Philosophy at the University of Nottingham frequently sponsors conferences in philosophy of religion. Addresses for many of these organizations are found in the *Directory of American Philosophers*, a publication of the Philosophy Documentation Center, Bowling Green State University.

## The Internet

In addition to online versions of most philosophy of religion journals, which require a paid subscription or access to a library with a paid subscription, there are some very useful encyclopedias, journals, blogs, and books that are available *free* of charge on the internet. For example, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/>) has numerous entries that directly bear on philosophy of religion and *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* (<http://ndpr.nd.edu/>) regularly reviews books in philosophy of religion. *Ars Disputandi* (<http://www.arsdisputandi.org/>) is a free online journal devoted entirely to philosophy of religion, and The Prosblogion (<http://prosblogion.ektopos.com/>) is an excellent philosophy of religion blog. Finally, many of the documents available on the Secular Web ([www.infidels.org](http://www.infidels.org)) can be correctly classified as philosophy of religion, including an interesting edited collection called *God or Blind Nature? Philosophers Debate the Evidence* (<http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/debates/great-debate.html>).

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